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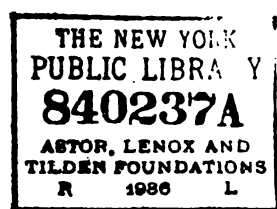
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HIS OWN COUNTRY


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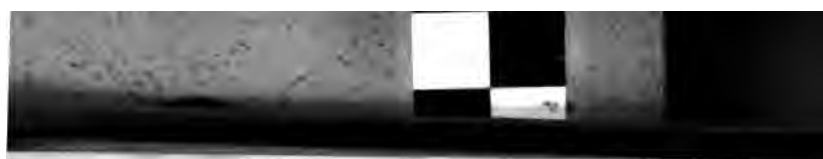


**TO
MY MOTHER**





HIS OWN COUNTRY



HIS OWN COUNTRY

CHAPTER I

AT WEYANOKE CROSS ROADS

"Well, sir," said Colonel Washington, addressing the Reverend Moncure Braxton, rector of Weyanoke Church, in Northmoreland County, Virginia, as he shook hands with that worthy gentleman at the door of his study, "well, sir, old Comorn Hall is sold at last."

"Comorn sold!" ejaculated Mr. Braxton, regarding the flushed but serious face of Colonel Washington with dismay. "Comorn sold; I can't believe it! Come in, sir; come in and tell me all about it."

"It's as good as sold, I reckon," the colonel said as he sank into his accustomed chair and mopped his face and pushed his short, crisp gray hair back from his forehead till it stood erect. The colonel hadn't much hair, but then, as he said himself, he didn't need it. The only time he ever missed it was when the sheep flies worried him in May and June. He didn't like to be caught out with his head uncovered at such seasons.

"You know I've had the matter in my hands for nearly two years now. I advertised the place in the northern papers, and we had some inquiries; then they dropped away, and I'd just about given up all hope of ever selling it for Cousin Jinny and the children, when a matter of six weeks ago I had a letter from a party in Montreal, Canada."

The colonel paused impressively. "Yes, sir; from Montreal. The last place on earth I ever expected to hear from. A party there wanted to know if Comorn Hall was still for

sale, and if so at what figure. I wrote back that the property was still on the market and named the price at twenty thousand cash. I got an answer offering fourteen on time. I told Mrs. Beverley and she was in favor of taking it, and paying off the mortgage Colonel Macie holds, and turning the balance in to pay old debts. But I held out, and to-day I got this letter, with a little extra impudence from Mamie Ann Dandridge at the post-office. I'm not sure which surprised me most."

The colonel waved an envelope in his plump hand.

"The party offers a compromise. He will give fifteen thousand for Comorn Hall and the twelve hundred and ninety acres, and three thousand more for the furniture in the house, the stock and implements and the crops already in the ground. Eighteen thousand altogether."

The colonel lowered his voice. "There's a check in this envelope for five hundred dollars to cover a three weeks' option. That looks like business, doesn't it?"

"I suppose," said Mr. Braxton, "the party's coming down to see the property and is afraid some one may get in ahead of him. Of course, you can't be sure of anything until he's looked it over."

"No, sir, that's where you're wrong," declared the colonel. "He's sent the money to bind the bargain if Mrs. Beverley accepts his offer. He wants the title gone over and the deed drawn up at once. He doesn't say a word about coming to see the property."

"But I don't understand a man investing so much money in a place he hasn't seen," insisted Mr. Braxton. "It isn't businesslike."

"I know it isn't," his friend assented. "But the strangest part of the whole business is, he seems to know as much about Comorn as I do. That's what puzzles me. I reckon he must be some northern man who was through here during the war. There were some Yankee troops quartered about here for a while, stealing our horses and setting our niggers free. He may have belonged to one of those regiments. Or

it's just barely possible he's one of the old Brents of Brentwood. Brent's his name—J. C. Brent, he signs himself. He's got 'Dr. J. C. Brent' printed on his letter paper."

"Brent," cried Mr. Braxton, brightening perceptibly; "Brent! That explains it all. He must be one of the family who has made his money up in Canada and now wants to get back home among his own people to spend a little of it like a gentleman."

"If that's so, I don't blame him," said the colonel with conviction. "There isn't a better place to spend money than right here."

"It must be so," Mr. Braxton insisted warmly. "Comorn is really a Brent place, too. The Beverley men were always marrying the Brent girls. Of course this Doctor Brent is one of the old Brents. You can be sure of that." He paused and then added with genuine relief: "I would not want a stranger coming in among us. No, sir, we don't want any undesirable northerner lording it at Comorn Hall."

"That's so," agreed Colonel Washington. "No doubt you're right about it." He referred to the letter in his hand. "It's the only way I can account for a good many things. He knows all the metes and bounds of Comorn, as the property stood before the war. He speaks here of the Wood Gate, and of Comorn Old Gate, and the Pole Gate, and he seems to know just where my line comes in beyond the Black Gum Swamp. And he wants to know how near Doctor Carniel's line comes—that strip of timber land old General Beverley sold the doctor, fronting on Brent's Cove. Well, sir, it would be a heap easier for Cousin Jinny and her girls and Watt if this man turns out to be a Brent of the old stock. But I never heard of any J. C. Brent; as far as I can remember, Doctor Brent hadn't any very near kin of his own name when he died. This might be a cousin's son. Some of them did scatter through the North and West; but I never heard of any of them making money. Those I remember were all just like the Beverleys, they could spend but they couldn't make. Improvident, all of them."

The colonel spoke complacently. "Never could adapt themselves to the new conditions. This man must have money or he couldn't offer eighteen thousand dollars for Comorn Hall. J. C. Brent? No, sir; I never heard that name before."

"Those initials might stand for John Conway," Mr. Braxton suggested; "there were Conways that were kin; or for John Custis, for they do say the Brents throw back to the Custis family. Well, it won't be long now until you know. And if this Doctor Brent is a rich man, and if Mrs. Beverley does sell to him and he settles at Comorn, he may do a great deal of good in this community."

As he spoke Mr. Braxton looked thoughtfully from the window.

A stone's throw from the rectory, and directly in the line of Mr. Braxton's vision, stood Weyanoke Church. Its strong brick walls had risen in their simple dignity soon after King George the First succeeded Queen Anne upon the throne of England. The rich communion service was, tradition said, the gift of the king himself. But now the cypress shingles, generations old, were curling away from the rafters in the hot sunshine.

Mr. Braxton sighed.

"What we need down here, sir, is new life; new life and northern capital."

Colonel Washington flushed.

"That's what we say we need, sir, but it isn't what we want. No, sir; what we really need down here is to be let alone, and that's just what the people in the North can't realize. We've got to work out our own salvation, but the Yankees think because they whipped us once they know more about our affairs than we do. If you don't think so, just read the rubbish in the northern papers."

"I never read those articles," Mr. Braxton answered hastily.

"I do," said the colonel, "and they make me so fighting mad I almost forget the war is over. What on earth do the Yankees know about the niggers or about conditions here? If

they had their way there'd be a carpetbagger like Macie, or a nigger, lording it to-day at Comorn Hall, with a white wife to keep his house for him. That's what all this newspaper talk comes to; race amalgamation, that's what the niggers want, and what their northern friends think they should have. Now, just suppose this Doctor J. C. Brent comes here airing such notions; suppose he interferes with our political arrangements and sets the niggers on; what'll we do then? You know what harm even a decent man can do down here before he learns his way about."

The colonel fumed and blustered and then smiled his genial smile and laughed his hearty laugh. "Oh, well, sir, have it your own way, have it your own way; invite all your rich Yankees down, only, thank the Lord, I'm too old to live to see the mischief; I'll be dead and gone to glory before the trouble comes, I reckon. All I've got to say is, I'm sorry for it. Poor Cousin Jinny and the girls and Watt! It does seem there might have been some other way out of their troubles."

"I don't suppose it is possible for Mrs. Beverley to keep the place." Mr. Braxton spoke with real regret. "If it were, I would not advise her to part with it."

"I understand, I understand," the colonel said. "But the truth is, the place scarcely pays its own taxes and keeps the family going, and where'd Watt ever get the money to pay Macie's mortgage? And then there are the old debts against the estate—Watt's grandfather's debts, and Watt's father's debts. If the place isn't sold, Colonel Macie might foreclose and take the property and nothing would be left to pay them. But if they take this offer now there'll be a clear six thousand over after Macie is paid off. That, with what I owe the estate, should settle everything and leave between four and five thousand dollars in the bank for them to make a new start with. Not much, but better than nothing, I reckon, better than nothing." And the colonel, having settled a great financial problem to his satisfaction, and shown himself a thorough man of business, mopped his forehead with his handkerchief and looked extremely worried.

"What does Mrs. Beverley expect to do when Comorn Hall is sold?" the rector asked. "Has she made any plans? Where is she going?"

"Going, sir!" Colonel Washington repeated with some irritation. "Mrs. Beverley isn't going, sir. Mrs. Beverley is coming, sir; coming to Piccadilly with the girls and Watt, until she has time to look about her. Mrs. Washington couldn't have her own dear sister, or her own dear sister's children, go to any house but ours. I'll look after Watt. I'm thinking a little of planting a few more oysters in that cove between Piccadilly house and the bungalow. The gun club people don't use the bungalow now; thrown it back on my hands; I may make Watt a proposition to go into the oyster business with me. He'll manage somehow until times are better, and I reckon Ada and Agnes won't care where they are while they have their mother to look after."

"How does Mrs. Beverley feel about it?" Mr. Braxton asked.

Colonel Washington shook his head gloomily.

"I haven't told her yet. Of course, I showed her the other letters when they came, and we talked over the terms with Watt and the girls, but I don't reckon they thought there was much chance of a sale before fall. Watt was certain it would drop through like all the other inquiries about the property. I'll stop at Comorn on my way home after we get through with this vestry meeting."

As he spoke there came a sound of wheels from the sandy road toward which the rectory faced. Both gentlemen looked from the window.

"It's Judge Beckford and Captain Fauntleroy," announced the colonel.

Hurrying out to meet the new arrivals they found Judge Beckford already hitching his horses to a convenient "swinging bough" in the rectory yard. The judge was tall and thin. His delicate aquiline features were covered with a skin the color of old parchment which contrasted with the snowy whiteness of his hair. An able lawyer, he had accumulated

an ample fortune at the bar before his appointment to the bench. Since his retirement he had lived on his estate at Avalon. Avalon was the judge's pride. He had built the house himself in fulfilment of a promise made to Mrs. Beckford before their marriage. "If you'll marry me, Mary," the peniless young lawyer had said, "I'll build you a bigger house at Avalon than the one the Yankees burned." And so in time the new Avalon had risen Phoenix-like from the ashes of the older Avalon, until when Judge Beckford handed the key to Mrs. Beckford it stood without a rival in size or costliness in all the counties of the Northern Neck.

Captain Fauntleroy, the judge's brother-in-law, was a much younger man. His plantation of King's Green adjoined Avalon, both lying some seven or eight miles to the southeast of Weyanoke Church. It was the habit of these gentlemen to attend the vestry meetings in company.

"Good morning, Parson. Good morning, Colonel," said Judge Beckford as the gentlemen shook hands. "Where's the doctor? Major Blackburn and Miss Bessie are just a little way behind us. We saw them coming up their lane from Lucky Hit as we drove by the gate. How is Mrs. Braxton? And how's Miss Kittie? Did Mrs. Beckford stop with Polly?" He turned to Colonel Washington. "They were going down to Comorn to see Mrs. Beverley and the girls about some entertainment Polly wants to get up for the church. I suppose they'll stop on their way back to tell Miss Kittie all about it. Lead the way, Parson, lead the way," he added, moving toward the rectory door. "I reckon we've got to get down to business this morning and vote a few new shingles on the roof of old Weyanoke. I didn't know why you wanted me to change my place to the ancestral Beckford pew until last Sunday when the rain dripped through on Mrs. Beckford's bonnet. Then I began to see your line of argument. I'm instructed to vote for the new shingles. Mrs. Beckford puts it in the light of an economy. I was in favor of moving back to the pew where we've been sitting in comparative dryness, but Polly says Murphy Bird's wife planted herself there the Sun-

day we vacated and she doesn't think we ought to interfere with her religion. Here's Doctor Carniel now," he added as a roomy buggy, drawn by a fat, stoop-shouldered old horse, stopped before the rectory gate, and its occupant, a sturdy gray-haired man, alighted and advanced to join them. "Good morning, Doctor. What's the news?" he asked.

"There's nothing strange, sir, nothing strange," the doctor answered. "Nothing seems to happen in our part of the world nowadays. We've had a past, sir, and I reckon we'll have a future, but the present slips along so easily a body scarcely knows it's here."

Mr. Braxton saw his opportunity and grasped it firmly.

"But even here change finds us out," he said. "Colonel Washington tells me that Mrs. Beverley has had an offer for Comorn Hall, and that he thinks she will accept it. That is a change we none of us wished to see," he added as he led the way toward the house.

"What's that, Jim?" Judge Beckford asked hastily. "An offer for Comorn Hall; are you certain?"

The little group paused in the doorway while Colonel Washington retold the story of "the party from Montreal."

For a moment Colonel Washington hoped that Judge Beckford would come to the rescue. It was well known that Watt Beverley and Polly Beckford had been in love for years, and that only the critical condition of the Beverleys' affairs prevented the announcement of their engagement. But if Judge Beckford entertained any intention of interfering to prevent the sale, he was careful to give no sign of it.

As Colonel Washington ceased speaking a smart trap drawn by two spirited horses drove through the rectory gate. In the trap sat Major Blackburn, of Lucky Hit, a ruddy gentleman with a mass of grizzled hair and a stiff mustache. His daughter, Miss Bessie, an only child, now a rather pretty but sharp-featured woman of thirty-six, sat at his side.

"Bessie is going to visit with Mrs. Braxton and Kittie until the vestry meeting is over," Major Blackburn said. "After-

ward we're going on down Brent's Neck." Then as he heard the news of Comorn he added: "Well, well, I'm sorry. It seems incredible that a Beverley will not always be at Comorn Hall."

"Oh, bother, pa," broke in Miss Bessie. "We've got to be progressive. That's the way I look at it. The world can't stand still just to keep the Beverleys at Comorn." And Miss Bessie "snapped" her bright black eyes at the assembled gentlemen.

"I wish it could," said Doctor Carniel. "There's a lot of change that isn't progress, though I reckon some of it goes by that name even down here nowadays."

"I suppose there's no doubt that Mrs. Beverley will accept this offer?" Judge Beckford asked.

"I reckon she can't expect a better one," the colonel answered. "And the way matters stand it's no use trying to hold out any longer."

"Humph!" said Doctor Carniel gruffly. "I don't give up my patients so easily or there'd be a heap higher death rate in Northmoreland County."

"You can't prescribe quinine for a mortgage, Doctor. And you can't pay outstanding debts with calomel. It isn't legal tender," said the judge.

"I'd like to give some people strychnine," declared the beligerent doctor. "I'm against all mortgage holders, past, present or to come."

Captain Fauntleroy inquiring who would represent the Canadian party when it came to closing the transaction, Colonel Washington replied that Doctor Brent had asked him to suggest the name of some attorney. He reckoned they would have to call in an outside lawyer as all the local members of the bar of any reputation were more or less closely related to the Beverleys in one way or another.

"Why don't you mention Colonel Macie's name?" Miss Bessie asked. "He knows all about the title or he wouldn't have loaned twelve thousand dollars on the property. If you'll

give me Doctor Brent's address, I'll see that Colonel Macie writes to him if that will save you any trouble. You take the address down on the back of something for me, pa."

"It seems to me, Miss Bessie, you're showing a very particular interest in increasing Colonel Macie's practise," said Judge Beckford, an amused twinkle gleaming in his eye. "Do you expect to receive a commission, or are you merely taking pity on the poor widower?"

"I hear our friend Macie is a looking widower," Captain Fauntleroy made bold to say.

Miss Bessie, with heightened color, scouted the very idea of such an idea. But the blush lingered on her cheeks. "You don't reckon this Doctor Brent can be any kin to me?" she asked. "He didn't say he was kin to the Brents of Brentwood, did he, Colonel? Anyway he can't be very near, for mother and Uncle Hampton were the only Brents of their generation, and poor crazy Cousin Constance and I are the only Brents left in this part of the world now."

A covert defiance lingered like a sting in the last words Miss Bessie spoke. She looked directly at Doctor Carniel as though to challenge him.

"Except young John Brent," the doctor added hastily. "You mustn't leave your cousin John Brent out, Miss Bessie."

"Don't you call that boy a Brent to me, Doctor Carniel," Miss Bessie cried sharply. "I don't count John Brent, or John Whatever-You-Call-Him, any kin of mine, and you know why I don't. I've counted your John Brent out of the Brent family once and for all, I can tell you that."

"He is his mother's son," the doctor insisted stubbornly. "And his mother is your own first cousin."

"It's all very well your taking John's part, Doctor Carniel, but there's another side to that story. You should hear what Colonel Macie has to say to the doings at Brentwood. I haven't seen Cousin Constance for a year, but Colonel Macie tells me she's getting crazier every day. He lives so close he can't help hearing things, and he thinks I ought to know what's going on. Some people believe she would be all the

better for firm treatment in an asylum. John's petting only spoils her."

"Don't talk to me about asylums," cried Doctor Carniel angrily. "If you knew as much about them as I do you'd know they're not the place to send a harmless woman. I absolutely disapprove of interfering with Miss Constance."

"Well, I may not know much about asylums," Miss Bessie admitted. "But I know exactly what I'm saying about Cousin Constance. You-all must remember that I spent five months in the same house with her three years ago when pa went west and we closed Lucky Hit. John is a grown man now, and he should go out in the world and shift for himself. He hasn't any prospects that warrant his staying on at Brentwood."

Doctor Carniel's face paled, then flushed with indignation as Miss Bessie spoke. Mr. Braxton and the others moved uneasily. Major Blackburn turned away and stared across at the old church. Miss Bessie was ruthlessly opening an old wound.

"It seems to me, ma'am," Doctor Carniel said in a voice which betrayed the restraint he put upon himself, "that John Brent's place is with his mother, and that his future should be here among his own people, on his mother's lands. To stay right where he is at Brentwood is the only advice he'll ever get from me."

Miss Bessie sniffed disdainfully. "You've always made a pet of that boy, Doctor. I suppose you're doing what you think is right. But a good many people believe you are only helping to spoil him by encouraging hopes for which there's no foundation."

"Oh, do be quiet, Bessie," urged her father.

"No, I won't be quiet, pa, and you needn't try to stop me," his daughter answered, and then continued with increasing vehemence. "People ought to appreciate that I have some rights in Brentwood. You-all know just as well as I do how Uncle Hampton's will was worded, like all the old wills in Virginia. Brentwood, and everything, was to go to Cousin Constance—after Cousin Charlotte's death—and then it was

all to go to Cousin Constance's children 'born in lawful wedlock,' and if there weren't any such children it was to come to ma or ma's heirs. That's exactly how the will is worded. Colonel Macie told me he happened to see Uncle Hampton's will one day when he was at the court-house, and that everything was to come to me, as ma's heir, if Cousin Constance dies without a legal heir. And you-all know just as well as I know that Cousin Constance never has been married. Colonel Macie said if I did what anybody else would do I'd apply to the court to have a guardian appointed. He says it's a scandal the way John's been cutting the timber off Brentwood, railroad ties, and cord-wood, and some saw-logs, too. The land won't bring ten dollars an acre, Colonel Macie says, if John keeps on cutting it over as he's been doing. Things can't be allowed to go on this way much longer, that's very certain."

Doctor Carniel was ready with his answer the moment Miss Bessie gave him an opening.

"I know all about the wording of the old doctor's will," he said, "and perhaps I know a little more even than Colonel Macie knows about the wood on Brentwood. John spoke to me before a single tree was felled. He needed ready money. No man can carry on a place like Brentwood without money. It isn't possible."

"Then why doesn't he go out and work to get it?" persisted Miss Bessie. "Why doesn't he go up north and get into some trade or business? I reckon we'll stop at Brentwood to-day, pa, on our way back from Burnt Quarter. Tell them, pa; they might as well know it now as any other time." Then without waiting for her father to speak, she hurried on. "I'm to be married to Colonel Macie in June, and pa's going to take me down to Burnt Quarter after the vestry meeting to help select the new wall-paper for the house. Colonel Macie intends to have it all done over before the wedding."

If there was any lack of heartiness in the felicitations of the gentlemen, the lack was well concealed by the eagerness

with which they welcomed any escape from the painful subject which Miss Bessie had forced upon their attention.

"Come in, come in," said Mr. Braxton. "I've got a funeral up in the Forest this afternoon, and I want to make an early start. We mustn't forget in congratulating Miss Bessie upon her happy prospects, that we've a vestry meeting to get through with. The judge doesn't like the rain dripping on Mrs. Beckford's bonnet, but if he were to come up in the chancel on a wet Sunday and dodge the leaks as I do, he'd have voted for a new roof long ago."

"There's no question about voting for the new roof," said the doctor, who had regained his usual good humor. "The question is, how are we ever going to pay for it."

"Might elect Doctor J. C. Brent to fill the vacancy in the vestry instead of Watt Beverley, and make him foot the bill," suggested Colonel Washington ironically.

"That would not be a bad idea if he buys Comorn," Captain Fauntleroy assented seriously. "We need every strong man in the parish on the vestry. But if we do elect him it will be the first time a Beverley has been passed over for an outsider in the history of the parish. Poverty ought to make us practical, I reckon, and Watt will have his hands full as it is. I don't suppose he'd mind waiting for the next vacancy."

"That's right, that's right," burst forth the colonel, not at all pleased to have been taken literally. "Turn us all topsyturvy, upset everything we're used to, so long as you make it pleasant for the Yankees. Come on, Parson, lead the way, sir, lead the way."

Still blustering, the colonel followed Mr. Braxton into the study.

"Since church and state have led the way, gentlemen," Judge Beckford said, "I reckon the plain people had better follow."

As the study door closed upon the vestrymen, Miss Bessie was made welcome by the rector's wife.

An hour later, the vestry meeting being over, Miss Bessie



rejoined her father and his friends as they were leaving the rectory.

"I do believe Doctor Carniel is so provoked with me that he won't come to my wedding," she laughed back to Mrs. Braxton, who had paused in the doorway. "But you and Kittie think I'm right, don't you? I can tell you all one thing," she cried defiantly to the startled group before her. "I don't care what anybody says, no nigger is going to have Brentwood after Cousin Constance dies if I can help it."

"No nigger?" Doctor Carniel repeated. Then with an indescribable gesture of repudiation he faltered and was silent.

The storm had burst at last.

There was a pause. Then Colonel Washington turned to Miss Bessie. His easy manner had suddenly become dignified. He spoke with strong displeasure, and with a hint of stern authority.

"You are the last person, ma'am, I should ever have expected would speak in this way of your cousin, or of your cousin's son. Every one here knows Miss Constance's story. We know that there is some great mystery surrounding the birth of her son. We know, too, that she can't defend herself, and that her mental condition may prevent John Brent ever learning his father's name. A long while ago every gentleman here agreed how we would look upon this matter. We agreed that Miss Constance, living at Brentwood among her old friends, cared for by servants who loved her, needed no special guardian appointed by the court. We agreed to consider her son John Brent her legal heir, who would, as he grew up, become her natural guardian and protector. We might have felt and acted differently if it hadn't been in Reconstruction times when we had got into the way of keeping our affairs out of the courts as much as possible, because we found scant justice in them. The law was in the hands of scalawags and carpetbaggers, and even then Brentwood was a tempting object, so we made this gentlemen's agreement. Up to this day no one has openly questioned the wisdom of our course, or questioned the legality of John Brent's birth. In the le

months these things of which you speak have been whispered among the negroes, and have come to Doctor Carniel's ears and to mine. All along we have been pretty sure who was back of this talk and why these stories were set afloat. We are certain now. There is no reason on earth for any man to say that young John Brent's blood is not as pure as yours or mine, or that he is not Miss Constance's legal heir according to her father's will. All that any one knows now, or ever will know, as far as I can see, is that Miss Constance left Brentwood soon after her father's death because she was unhappy with her stepmother.

"Every one here remembers that poor woman. She was a cousin of Miss Constance's mother, and she was kin to most of us in one way or another. Cousin Charlotte, we called her. She was a disappointed and embittered woman. I wouldn't speak against her except in justice to the living. She'd been at Brentwood for something over fifteen years before Miss Constance's mother died; she'd helped to manage the house and she acted as Miss Constance's governess.

"From the moment the old doctor married her she made him trouble. First she made him sell Hetty and her boy, Julius Cæsar. Maybe she had reason. General Beverley took them to oblige the doctor. People said Mrs. Brent was mad enough about it. She wanted Hetty and the boy sent down to Baton Rouge or New Orleans. When she'd got rid of Hetty and young Julius Cæsar, she began to make trouble with the doctor about Miss Constance—God knows why, for there never lived a sweeter or a better girl. I reckon Cousin Charlotte was one of those women who let disappointment turn their hearts into a canker. I never knew any one to hold so long to fancied slights and grievances as she did. She wasn't satisfied until she'd cut the doctor off from all his friends. And she made a sort of prisoner of Miss Constance.

"Of course Cousin Charlotte thought she'd be a rich woman when the doctor married her. People said she loved money almost as much as she loved authority. Then the war came along and poverty and ruin with it. She hadn't any money

and she hadn't any slaves. Then the old doctor died. And people blamed her and said she'd worried him to death. I suppose she heard the talk, for she shut herself up at Brentwood and shut everybody out. She let it be known she didn't want the young men coming there to see Miss Constance, and everybody kept away. There was some talk of a young Confederate officer staying there, some kin or cousin of her own on the Page side of the family. I never saw him. He had to go. Folks said she didn't want Constance to marry, for then she'd lose control of Brentwood. Those were hard times, and busy times, for all of us. That's why, I reckon, not a soul among her old friends knew that Miss Constance had left home till we heard she'd been seen in Washington with young Julius Cæsar, Hetty's son, the boy who ran away from Comorn Hall after Doctor Brent had sold him to General Beverley.

"When people asked Mrs. Brent about Miss Constance she made excuses, said she reckoned Constance would soon be back at Brentwood. But Constance didn't come. Mrs. Brent must have heard from her, for about a year later she left Brentwood in a hurry and went north to Philadelphia to meet her and bring her home. At least that's what she told Aunt Jane and Uncle Isaac she was going for. She didn't tell any one else a thing about it."

The colonel paused.

"Poor woman, you know how she was burned to death in that hotel in Philadelphia. That's all in the old papers for any one to see that's got the heart to read it. Some of the people we saw in Philadelphia afterward said if she'd stayed in her room they might have saved her as they did Miss Constance. But when she ran up-stairs and tried to cross the roof, and the fire followed before the ladders reached her—— But there's no use talking about that now. It was only by good luck we ever learned that she and Miss Constance had been there. She'd bought some black clothes that afternoon, and ordered them sent to the hotel. Through that her name got in the papers, and Doctor Carniel and I went north to bring Miss Constance home.

"We found her in a hospital, where she's been carried from the fire. She didn't even know us when we spoke to her. The next day her son, John Brent, was born. We had him christened John, because poor Miss Constance kept saying that name over and over, and we thought it must have been her husband's name. For weeks, the doctor here will tell you, he didn't expect that she could live. But he pulled her through somehow.

"I had to come back to Virginia, but the doctor stayed there in Philadelphia for something like two months. Then he brought Miss Constance and her baby home to Brentwood. And from that day when we found her in the hospital to this, her mind has been unbalanced and her memory a blank.

"Everything she had with her at the hotel, everything which might have helped to solve the riddle, everything that Mrs. Brent had taken from Brentwood, was destroyed by fire. If there were any letters that might have helped to clear the mystery, they were lost, too. There wasn't a clue left by which we could learn one thing about Miss Constance's history after she left Brentwood, nor by which we could trace her husband. It was all wiped out—just as completely as the terror of that night and her long illness blotted out her mind and memory.

"But I've always thought she had just lost her husband, and was coming home to Brentwood, and that it was for her that Mrs. Brent had ordered the black dresses from the store."

The colonel paused again.

"That's the whole story. It's no groundwork for these horrible insinuations that are being spread abroad. They are all wicked lies, ma'am, wicked lies."

"The story doesn't sound quite the same when other people tell it, Colonel," said Miss Bessie. "There's usually a good deal more about Hetty's son, Julius Caesar, that handsome yellow boy, and why Aunt Charlotte wouldn't rest until Uncle Hampton sold him to General Beverley and got him off the place—because Cousin Constance spoiled him so that people talked about it. Nobody's forgotten, either, that when Julius Caesar ran away from Comorn Hall, and they caught him in

groomed farm horses completed the not incongruous whole. Seated at large ease upon the back seat of the vehicle, the absence of the coachman's box and the glass which had no doubt once protected that quarter of the carriage permitted Colonel Washington the pleasure of driving himself.

More as a concession to usage than from any need, as the mild spring day made a covering unnecessary, and the recent rains had considerably laid the dust, Colonel Washington drew a tattered quilt across his knees, the cotton showing in gray tufts where the diamond patchwork had given way to time and weather; applied the piece of willow switch which so adequately supplied the place of the familiar carriage whip of commerce, and lifting his hat in acknowledgment of the salutations of his friends, slowly got under way for Comorn Hall.

Colonel Washington, it was well known, had small regard for externals; appearances counted for very little with him. The colonel wanted to know who a man was, and how he behaved himself. He based his judgment upon character and conduct. And his judgments were not lightly regarded by his friends. Colonel Washington was a gentleman, and he knew a gentleman when he saw one. He could not be imposed upon by any outward sign if the inward grace was lacking. And he was as confident of the high regard and respect of his neighbors as he drove away from Weyanoke Cross Roads in his shabby old ghost of a carriage as his grandfather had been before him when he traveled the same roads in the same carriage in the days of its glory, or as his grandfather's uncle had been when he rolled away from Mount Vernon in his coach to become the first president of the United States.

CHAPTER II

THE BEVERLEYS OF COMORN HALL

As Colonel Washington's equipage diminished in the long perspective of the sandy road, the gentlemen paused for a brief consideration of the great news.

Whatever their subsequent interest might be in the purchaser of Comorn Hall, whose advent in their isolated community must affect them all more or less nearly, their first feeling was one of profound regret for Mrs. Beverley and her children who, by the sale of their old home, were to face the last and most bitter of the changes which followed so swiftly in the wake of Everard Beverley's death.

The Beverleys had thriven in Virginia, growing in consequence and power as their lands broadened, until they reached the zenith of their fortunes in the years which immediately preceded the War of Independence. In 1780 the Beverley of that day had built the stately manor house which was now to pass from the possession of his descendants.

Comorn Hall stood on a neck of land, comprising some twelve thousand acres, which stretched its low-lying wooded reaches and its flat tobacco fields far out into the broad expanse of the mighty Potomac not many miles above the point at which the river mingled its waters with the blue waves of the Chesapeake.

Here at Comorn the Beverleys of many generations had been born, here for the most part they had died, and here they lay at rest under their monuments in the old burying-ground upon the hillside, scarcely a stone's throw from the steep dormer-windowed roof which had sheltered them in life.

A few paces below the funereal cedars that kept their whis-

pering vigils above the sleep of the departed Beverleys, on either side of a quiet ravine which sloped gently to the waters of Brent's Cove, slept in their unmarked graves the generations of their trusted household slaves.

With the Revolution and the passing of colonial institutions and prerogatives the family fortunes suffered some decline. The numerous plantations, hitherto all tributary to the home estate, and which together made up the splendid total of eighty thousand acres, and the thousand slaves, had dwindled from generation to generation until at the beginning of the Civil War the owner of Comorn Hall was master only of the twelve thousand acres which comprised the home plantation, and a hundred slaves.

In the utter ruin which came upon the South with the defeat of her armies, General Beverley, returning to Comorn poor, broken-hearted and already bowed with years, had no choice but to sacrifice a portion of his remaining acres that he might begin his life anew and do a little of the good of which there was such desperate need in those black days.

General Beverley had felt the dignity and importance of his hereditary position in the community more keenly in the hour of its great necessity than he had ever felt it in the days when its prosperity ministered to his importance and his wealth.

The freedman idling at the crossroads store turned instinctively to his old master when inexperience and improvidence had brought the wolf to his door, and the poor white also, who had fought so bravely in Beverley's Brigade, now turned to his late commander not alone for guidance but for material assistance. And so the acres of Comorn fell away while the mortgages and debts increased.

At the general's death his son, Colonel Everard Beverley, then a little past the prime of life, found the estate heavily burdened, and his futile struggle, made more hopeless by a thousand generous impulses, had served only to reduce further the number of its acres and to increase the total of its debts.

It was a long drive from Weyanoke Cross Roads to the manor house and, the heat increasing as the sun neared

zenith, the kindly colonel permitted his horses to take their own shambling pace along the lonely road. For the most part the way lay between unfenced and neglected fields which were fast being overgrown with pines and sassafras, and where broom-sedge and brambles thrived.

Here and there a strip of barbed-wire fence enclosed a thriftier field where a negro shouted at his team as he turned the brown earth back in crisp furrows from his plow. Then followed long stretches of unbroken melancholy woodlands from which the finer timber had long since been cut. Now and again the mistletoe showed its tuft of silvery green in the top of a tall gum which had escaped the ax, and everywhere gleamed the rich green of the laurel and the holly.

Twice or thrice the road led by a whitewashed cabin, rudely built of logs or clapboards; backed by its thriftless garden patch, its scanty house trees, ax-scarred and gaunt, sheltering the inevitable dilapidated ruin upon wheels; a negro habitation, squalid, neglected and uncouth.

Now and then a track led off through the woods or across a wind-swept, unfenced clearing to an unseen habitation, or, more traveled, to a remote plantation on the shore.

On and on the road led down the Neck. To the right and to the left, a mile or more away, the great tidal river stretched wide arms inland, separating by broad bays the ancient domain of the Beverleys from the neighboring estates, bays whose farther shores were purpled by the distance; while Maryland, low-lying, only rimmed with blue the wide expanse of water. But from the road itself, which traversed the center of the Neck, the water never once was visible.

Colonel Washington was just congratulating himself that not more than a mile of the sandy road yet lay between him and Comorn Old Gate, when his observant eye discerned a familiar form swinging along the road a hundred yards ahead. He urged his horses to a brisker pace.

"Hey, hello there! Is that you, John Brent?" he called as he overtook the pedestrian. "What are you doing on this side of Brent's Cove at this time of day? Climb in, climb in;

my way is your way if you're going toward Comorn." As he spoke he checked his not unwilling horses and, leaning out, cordially extended a plump hand to the young man who advanced to take it.

Disbelieve the whispered scandal as firmly as he might, yet it was but human that Colonel Washington's keen gray eyes lingered more intently on the young man's face than was their wont. He had known John as a baby; then as a child playing about the garden at Brentwood; he had seen him grow into a handsome sturdy boy who often rowed or sailed his boat across the cove to make a holiday with his own sons at Piccadilly. He had seen him a hundred times at Comorn Hall, the playfellow and bosom friend of young Watt Beverley, the devoted slave of Watt's sisters, Ada and Agnes. He had always thought that his son Bushrod, Watt Beverley and John Brent were three as fine and handsome young fellows as could be found in all Virginia, but now as he searched John's face in the moment of their meeting he was forced to own to himself that while Bushrod was unequalled for good nature, and Watt for an indescribable distinction which seemed to be the heritage of all the Beverleys, yet neither could be compared with John Brent, in his rough boots and corduroys, for manly strength of form or manly beauty of feature.

The face was resolute and strong to a degree unusual in so young a man. The dark hair as he lifted his hat to the colonel was seen to curl closely above a fine broad brow; his skin was olive and darkened by exposure to the sun and weather; his eyes were gray or hazel, blending and deepening into black as the light shone on them or as they were in shadow, or as he smiled or frowned; his brows were clearly marked and almost met above a short well-modeled nose; his mouth beautiful and strong; his chin massive and perhaps too heavy but for its cleft which lent a pleasant assurance of good humor. His expression was frank and open. When he spoke his voice was unusually deep and musical.

"How about the horses, Colonel? They look hot and tired."

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"Get in, get in, I reckon it's the harness you're afraid of." And the colonel laughed his hearty laugh. "Take a corner of the laprobe, John," he added hospitably as he started his team down the road again, "and tell me how your mother is. Major Blackburn and Miss Bessie were at Weyanoke. Yes, I've just come from there; we've had a vestry meeting. Voted a new roof on the church because the rain dropped through on Mrs. Beckford's bonnet. Only reason I could see for doing it. Miss Bessie said they were going down to Burnt Quarter to help Colonel Macie select his new wall-paper. They're to be married soon. Infernal scoundrel. How that man's got around her beats the devil."

He paused and then continued in a more serious tone. "Miss Bessie said she might stop at Brentwood on their way back to see your mother."

John Brent's handsome face clouded ominously as the colonel spoke.

"I wish Cousin Bessie would keep away from Brentwood. The very sight of her upsets mother so she doesn't get over it for days. I reckon I should go home at once; but I can't very well do that. Lorella's bad again," he explained. "One of her trances coming on, she thinks. Her father sent Tiger for Doctor Carniel. The doctor'd gone, so Tiger came on down to Brentwood and left a message with Aunt Jane. Hamp always tells Tiger to get me if he can't get the doctor. I reckon he thinks because grandfather was a physician that I must know something about medicine. The fact that I've been studying law doesn't seem to change his opinion in the least."

"How long have you been studying, John?" inquired the colonel.

"I shouldn't have said I'd really been studying at all," the young man answered modestly. "There were a lot of old law books in grandfather's library and I got to taking them down. Then one day Judge Beckford stopped with Doctor Carniel and told me the right ones to begin with. He's been directing my reading ever since."

"What does Doctor Carniel say about Lorella?" asked the colonel.

"It's a mighty puzzling case. At first he thought Lorella must be shamming when she had these trances. But now he says he doesn't think so. The poor thing lives in perfect terror of them, and she's got a horrible idea that some time people will believe she's really dead and bury her alive."

"Poor girl," said the colonel with a grimace. "I don't blame her if she is scared. Ugh! Such an idea's enough to scare anybody."

"Of course you know that Rance Williams has left Lorella and has gone to drive for Judge Beckford at Avalon. Lorella never speaks about him to me, but Hamp says she broods over his leaving her."

"Rance Williams is a worthless nigger if there ever was one," the colonel declared. "Lorella should thank her lucky stars she's rid of him. They weren't married a month before he was spending every cent Lorella earned at her washtub on Mignonette Jackson and those Mably girls. I've heard he's gone so far as to promise to marry Mignonette as soon as Lorella dies. Watt had to put a stop to things, and then Rance went off to Avalon. Mignonette's as mad as blazes, but she doesn't say much or her father'd make short work of her. Uncle Robert's one of the best men I know, yes, sir, one of the best men I know, black or white, and Aunt Rachel's a good woman, and Cousin Jinny says young Tilly's a good girl, but I wouldn't trust Mignonette a foot farther than I could throw a bull by his toe. No, sir, not a foot farther. Watt says she won't steal anything she can't carry, and that's about the best that can be said for her, I reckon."

"You saw the doctor at the vestry meeting, I suppose?" John asked after having given due consideration to Colonel Washington's flattering estimate of Mignonette's character.

"Certainly, certainly," the colonel replied hastily. "I don't reckon we'd have gone so far as to vote for that new roof without incriminating him. The whole business is between

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the doctor and Mrs. Beckford's bonnet, anyhow, dogged if it ain't."

"You are going to turn in at Comorn Old Gate, Colonel?" John asked.

"Yes, I'm going to stop by," the colonel replied, a shadow crossing his genial countenance. "I've business at the Hall. I reckon Comorn's sold at last."

"Comorn sold!" cried the boy. "Comorn sold. It can't be! Comorn sold," he repeated as he stared ahead. After a moment he asked: "What will Mrs. Beverley do, and the girls, and Watt? Can't something be done to keep the place for them?"

The colonel shook his head. "You know about the mortgage?"

"Yes, I know; but I thought, I hoped—well, you know, Colonel, I always hoped Judge Beckford would take it up for Polly's sake and Watt's."

"Judge Beckford hasn't volunteered. Perhaps he hasn't so much money as people think he has. Then Mrs. Beckford's always said when Polly married she wanted her to live at Avalon. Maybe she thought if Watt had Comorn on his hands she couldn't manage it. I don't know. He hasn't volunteered. So far as I can see Mrs. Beverley will have no choice but to accept this offer."

"Poor Mrs. Beverley," John said. "Poor Watt! It won't be like giving up an ordinary house. The old Hall's more than a home to them. Sell Comorn, why, it seems like sacrilege."

"Damned if it doesn't," agreed the colonel.

They sat in silence until they passed the negro school-house and the negro church and burying-ground, and so came in sight of the two small, square, red brick lodges which guarded, one on either hand, the entrance to Comorn Hall. This was Comorn Old Gate.

"You haven't seen very much of Watt lately, have you, John?" the colonel asked.

"No, Watt never gets over to Brentwood these days, and I've been busy all winter in the woods, and then the spring plowing and planting came along."

"Been cutting considerable wood, I hear," suggested the colonel tactfully.

"Yes, quite a little," John answered seriously. "It's about the only way I can get hold of any ready money for repairs and taxes."

"You going to stop at Hamp Sam's to see Lorella? Well, here's Hamp Sam now."

As he spoke the colonel checked his horses and the old carriage stopped before a squalid negro cabin which stood a little back from the roadside within a hundred yards of Comorn Gate. In the rough patch of garden which lay between the cabin and the road Hamp Sam, a tall albino, was at work with a heavy-handled hoe. He desisted from his labors as he saw the carriage, and raising his huge hand to his forehead in salute, bent his body in a deferential bow. Having executed this propitiatory maneuver, he advanced to the road and stood beside the dusty wheel.

Hamp Sam's features were sharp and aquiline; tufts of yellowish wool rose on either side of his head in points, while between them his forehead receded, bald and shining. A pointed tuft of yellow wool upon his chin heightened the singular effect. His skin was of a creamy whiteness darkened by tan, and powdered thickly with freckles. His eyes were small and of a bright red-hazel, but weak and blinking in the sunlight. His feet were bare. His clothing the familiar tatterdemalion of the negro field-hand.

"Well, Hamp," said Colonel Washington, addressing the albino with the usual easy mixture of suspicion and cordial familiarity which he accorded him. "How's Lorella? I hope she's better now that her worthless husband has gone to Avalon. Pity he couldn't go to glory."

"Lorella's pretty tol'able poorly, Colonel, pretty tol'able poorly. She's into the house there with a dreadful misery in her head. I sent her brother, Tiger, up to the Cross Roads

for the doctor, and I told him if he couldn't find him he was to go on to Brentwood house for Mr. John. He ain't come home yet," he added, blinking his red eyes at John. "I don't reckon he came back across the cove with you."

"No," said John, "I didn't see Tige. He just left your message with Aunt Jane. He'd gone before I started."

"Shiftless nigger," said his father. "That boy certainly ain't no good nohow, Lord bless my soul he ain't. Yes, Rance's gone," he added, "and I don't care if I never set eyes on him round this-a-way again. He ain't treated Lorella right, and that's the Lord's truth. He'll get come up with for it yet. He's so low-down worthless he ain't even a Christian. No, sir, he ain't even a Christian!"

"I won't keep you, Colonel," John said as he made his exit from the carriage with a due regard for the infirmity of the step. "Perhaps I'll come on down to Comorn, after all, when I've seen if there is anything I can do for Lorella."

"I reckon I'll be gone before you get there," the colonel answered.

They shook hands heartily and then as the colonel started his horses John Brent followed Hamp Sam into the squalid cabin where the sick girl lay.

Hamp Sam was a nephew of Uncle Isaac, the faithful old negro who, with his wife, Aunt Jane, had remained loyal to the family at Brentwood through all the vicissitudes which followed the Civil War. Hamp himself was born a slave in the quarters at Brentwood. When freedom came he decided to take his master's name for his own use. "I'se gwine call myself after you-all, master," he had begun, shuffling from one bare foot to another and blinking his red eyes distressingly, "Tiger ain't no name at all. I'se gwine call myself Mister Hampton Samuel—"

"Stop there," cried the old doctor, "that's enough of my name for you. I won't have you young niggers disgracing the name of Brent. Anyway, how will my name go round among you all if the first one that comes along wants the whole of it. Hamp Sam's enough for you, I reckon."

And Hamp Sam it had remained.

Hamp "enjoyed" a very doubtful reputation. Soon after the war he disappeared with his mother, Old Henrietta, or Hetty, as she was sometimes called, and the neighborhood had considered itself well rid of both. A rumor floated back and circulated through the negro cabins that Hamp Sam had fallen upon evil courses, and had been arrested and publicly whipped for horse-stealing. After time had laid this rumor to rest Hamp suddenly reappeared in Northmoreland County, finally electing to settle on Beverley's Neck, across the cove from his old home. The years had not improved the albino's reputation and he was held in fear by whites and negroes alike as an irresponsible and sinister character to whom a wide berth should be given.

A frowning negro girl of nineteen or twenty issuing reluctantly from one of the lodges in response to Colonel Washington's hello, swung the gate open, and then stood aside to let the carriage pass, scarcely deigning to acknowledge the colonel's genial salutation.

"What's the matter, Mignonette?" the colonel demanded cheerfully. "You look sour as persimmons in summer-time. Rance Williams forgot to write you since he's been at Avalon? Never mind. You stick to Fred Catchiniel when he comes back to teach school in the fall, and you'll do better by yourself than you will trying to take Lorella's husband away from her. 'Deed you will."

"Mr. Williams don't have to ask my leave to write to any lady or gentleman he pleases," the girl replied, her countenance heavy with sullen irritation. "I don't reckon he'd thank me or anybody else to meddle up into his affairs. I got enough to tend to minding my own business if others ain't."

But the carriage had rolled on and Mignonette addressed her angry mutterings to the sunny midday air.

Once past the gate the road led through woodlands for little way, and then across a stretch of well-kept, park-like meadow land from which the forests fell away on either hand and so to a slight rise when Comorn Hall came sudden

in view seated among its ancient trees, its solid mass of masonry placed well back from the crest of a ridge where the plateau descended abruptly to the level of the vast reach of fields and wooded lowlands which, sea-encompassed, spread like a great map to the distant confines of their shores. Beyond the land, the sail-flecked waters lay blue and shimmering beneath the noonday sun. Less than half a mile away upon the left, under the wooded bluffs, Brent's Cove stretched far inland, dwindling to the narrow channel where the wharf at Weyanoke Landing marked the last point to which the steamer could ascend.

An avenue of gnarled old cherry trees, of huge girth, guarded the approach. Roses and altheas, lilacs and old-fashioned shrubs were massed and grouped about the house and scattered through the grounds. While beyond, orchards and meadows spread away to right and left.

Every line of the house was eloquent of the time and place of its building. When its thick walls were rising, George the Second and Queen Caroline ruled in England and Virginia, and their majesties' governor held viceregal state in his palace at Williamsburg. Colonel Lee was rebuilding his seat at Stratford on the Nomini Bluffs farther up the river in Westmoreland County, and, as Thackeray tells us, no less a person than Colonel Henry Esmond had come over from England a few years before and had built himself a new Castlewood in this same neighboring county of Westmoreland. Therefore it behooved Colonel Beverley to build substantially and well, and that he had the old Hall bore ample witness.

Colonel Beverley had no doubt discussed the planning of his house with Colonel Lee, with the result that Comorn Hall bore a strong resemblance to Stratford House. The plans had been modified, however, in some important particulars. Like Stratford, the first, or basement, story was low, above it rose the principal floor of the house, with ceiling thirteen feet in height. This story was approached independently of the one beneath it, by a wide flight of stone steps that led directly to the main door of the entry. Above this lofty



story the fine roof sloped back from the caves and massive cornice to two great stacks of chimneys, four in each, exactly resembling those at Stratford House. But, unlike Stratford, the roof was pierced by many dormer windows, which admitted light and air to the low attic sleeping-rooms.

Ascending the flight of stone steps and passing through the heavy doorway, sometimes called the Great Door to distinguish it from all its fellows in the house, the broad hall was entered. This hall, or The Passage, as it was often termed, stretched through the house from front to front. Its walls, with splendid opulence, were paneled to the ceiling in mahogany. At its farther end a broad staircase rose to a gallery which crossed the hall above the River Door, from which another flight of steps led to the floor above, where, through graceful arches, one passed to the long corridor which traversed the house from end to end, a distance of some ninety feet. On either side of this corridor opened the low dormer-windowed sleeping-rooms.

From the great hall low doors led to the public rooms on either hand. Of these the drawing-room had been its builder's pride. Its walls, like those of the hall, were paneled in mahogany. Above the wide fireplace a carved overmantel rose to the cornice which, too, was richly carved. The heavy casings of the doors and windows were formed of fluted columns which supported carved capitals and cornices. Even the panels of the doors and inner shutters were richly ornamented by the craftsman's chisel.

Tradition said that a convict had been imported from England as an indentured servant by Colonel Beverley to adorn his home, and had received his freedom as the reward of his skilled workmanship.

Uncle Robert, the Beverleys' coachman, took Colonel Washington's horses. Tilly, Uncle Robert's daughter, admitted him to the house.

In a moment Mrs. Beverley came to him as he stood in the doorway of the drawing-room. She was a tall slight woman of fifty, wearing a simple dress of black, with white bands

throat and wrists. Her face, gentle and sweet in its framing of white hair, was not without evidences of the beauty and high spirits for which she had been so noted in her youth.

"Well, James, I presume you've come to tell me that your correspondent in Canada has written to break off negotiations. Watt!" she called from the open window that faced the gardens and the distant river, "do ask Mrs. Beckford and Polly to come in; Colonel Washington is here. Tell your sisters their Uncle Jim is here."

She turned from the window.

"You'll stay to lunch, of course, and shan't I have Tilly bring you a glass of water? When Watt comes he shall mix a julep for you."

As Mrs. Beverley spoke her son entered the room. Watt Beverley was a young man of twenty-three or twenty-four, very handsome after the type of his family, above medium height, broad-shouldered, slender-waisted, and showing not only the unmistakable signs of his Virginian birth, but the heightened ease and confidence which his two years at the University of Virginia had given him before his father's death recalled him to Comorn and the management of the plantation. Having a certain taste in dress, he wore well-fitting riding clothes which were not unbecoming to him. He had, in fact, a little the air and manner of a good-natured young dandy. His mother's intense pride in him was so evident that Colonel Washington could not conceal a quizzical smile.

"Mrs. Beckford and Polly went out to the burying-ground a little while ago with Ada and Agnes, mother," the young man said. He spoke with a marked Virginian accent which added a touch of boyishness to his speech. His mother was glad that her son's tutors had never been able to rid him of the sweet speech of his childhood. "What about a julep, Uncle Jim? I've been down in the corn-field and I'm as thirsty as if I'd been to a vestry meeting."

"By and by," said his uncle. "Planting corn in those clothes, Watt?"

"Indeed he has been," said his fond mother.

Watt grinned derisively.

"Planting, no. Just looking on. I've let the niggers put the fields in on the shares this spring."

"So I've heard," the colonel answered disapprovingly. "They'll ruin the land. I do the same thing at Piccadilly, but that's no excuse for you."

"What's the use," Watt asked, suddenly despondent, "I can't help it. I haven't any fertilizer. If I don't let the niggers work it on the shares, the whole place will soon grow up to sassafras and broom-sedge."

"Well, it's a bad practise, anyway, but I reckon it won't matter now."

"Won't matter, James? You don't mean—James—you can't mean—" Mrs. Beverley could say no more. She had become very white and quick tears filled her eyes.

"Yes, I do, Jinny. I mean just that. That man in Canada, that Doctor J. C. Brent I told you about, has written to accept the terms you-all offered him. He's sent a check for five hundred dollars to bind the bargain. So I reckon it means business this time."

As he spoke the colonel drew the letter from his pocket and, finding the check, extended it to Mrs. Beverley.

Mrs. Beverley waved it away with a hand that had suddenly become tremulous.

Watt took the check in silence and stood frowning down at it.

Two girls entered the room. One was tall and fair, dressed in white muslin, with a black ribbon at her waist; the other was shorter by a head, her dark hair framing a sweet dimpled face, her dress as delicate and seemingly as many-hued as a rainbow.

A sense of disaster fell upon the room and hushed them. Ada, the tall fair girl, went quickly to her mother's side. Polly Beckford turned with a look of inquiry to Watt. Suddenly the young man flung his broad-brimmed hat roughly

upon the floor and, sinking down beside the window, buried his face in his sunburned hands.

"Mother, Watt, what is it? What has happened?" Ada cried.

Polly Beckford took a step toward the door.

"Perhaps I'd better go," she said.

Mrs. Beverley checked her.

"Don't go, Polly. Watt will wish you to know." She turned to Ada as if for comfort and support. "Comorn is sold. Your Uncle James has brought the letter. Don't give way, Watt. How can we be brave if you break down?"

"I don't care! I don't care! Comorn's gone—it's gone—our home is gone. We've owned the land two hundred years and more, and we're the first to go. Why couldn't we have stayed on here until we died!"

"Hush, Watt, hush, my son. Remember you take your father's place. We've only you to look to now."

"Then we won't sell," the boy cried, rising and confronting his uncle with an angry frown. "We'll stay here, here at old Comorn. I'll work the place myself. I don't care what Uncle Jim advises, we'll stay here."

"Watt, Watt, be just," Ada entreated him. "Don't blame Uncle Jim for what he's done for us. You know the place is mortgaged, that we shall lose it if it isn't sold. And then we could not even pay our debts. We were Beverleys before Comorn was built, we shall be Beverleys when it is ours no longer."

Even as she spoke the brave words her voice broke and she turned to the open window, where the first roses nodded in from the clambering branches. She saw the white path lead away between the high box hedges to the stately terraces; she thought of the new graves in the old burying-ground on the hillside, and stole back to her mother's side, slipping her strong young arm about the slender waist.

Colonel Washington crossed the room to his nephew and laid his weather-beaten hand firmly but not unkindly on his shoulder.

"Come, sir, you've got to face it like a man. Let your mother and the girls give way, you mustn't. You've got to be a man."

"That's just it, Uncle Jim, I've got to be a man, I've got to bear a load I don't know how to bear. I don't reckon I'll shirk, but I don't reckon I'll do anything but fail. We were anchored here at Comorn. I didn't know I loved it so." Glancing about the room, he shook his head. "It's the only home we'll ever have."

"Don't say that, Watty, not while my house stands," said Colonel Washington, the quick tears coming to his eyes. "I don't reckon a Beverley could be homeless if he tried in old Northmoreland County."

CHAPTER III

ADA AND JOHN

As Colonel Washington spoke Polly Beckford slipped quietly from the room and went in search of her mother and Agnes Beverley. She found them at last in the old stone dairy, where Agnes had taken Mrs. Beckford to show her the crocks of milk and cream and the rolls of freshly made butter.

Agnes was by many considered more beautiful than Ada. Polly and her mother would have said so without hesitation, but Agnes, though a careful student of her own charms, would have dissented.

"You must live in the same house with Ada to know what a beauty she really is," Agnes had once said. "It is always a delight to watch her, from morning till night. It never matters what she has on, or what she is doing, she's always lovely to look at. No one compares with Ada, no one ever will."

As Polly paused on the threshold of the dairy, she heard Agnes speaking.

"Oh, no, indeed, we never let the servants come in here. Ada and I take care of it all. That's why the Comorn butter brings such high prices in Baltimore." She turned from the crocks as Polly entered. "Where have you left Ada?" she asked. Then as she saw the tears in Polly's blue eyes she demanded: "Why, Polly Beckford, what's the matter? Who in this world has been making you cry?"

"Poor Watt!" she said when Polly told her of the letter Colonel Washington had brought. "Poor mother! You'll both come in and help to comfort them? We haven't any secrets from you, Polly, nor from you, Mrs. Beckford, and of course Watt will want you to know all about it."

But Polly would not be persuaded. She detained her



mother in the garden while Agnes left them to hurry to the house.

"I really think we should go in, Polly," Mrs. Beckford said, beginning to draw on the long tan gloves she carried in her hand. "Of course we can't stay to lunch now. Moreover, I want to hear what your father has to say to this."

"It's awful, isn't it?" Polly lamented, deeply and sincerely troubled. "It's the most dreadful thing I ever heard of. They can't leave Comorn. It isn't right that they should go. Oh, mother, if you'd seen poor Watt you'd understand how hard it's going to be."

Mrs. Beckford buttoned her tan gloves with precision. Her thin lips were set in a way to suggest that she was holding pins between them as she spoke.

"I'm not sure it isn't all for the best, Polly," she began with calm aloofness. "This sale will clear off all the debts left when Watt's father died, and that will leave Watt free. While they kept the Hall the girls might have been slow to marry; now they'll not be able to pick and choose; and Mrs. Beverley, I suppose, will live with one of them. If this hadn't happened Watt very likely would have had his hands tied all his life. Now, with what your father can do for him, it should be plain sailing for you both. And I shall never need to let you go away from Avalon. You know I told Watt all along that he'd never have my consent to take you away from your father and from me. Things usually turn out for the best, and I think they will in this case."

"I wish you and father saw it all in some different way," Polly answered, pausing in their slow walk toward the house to pluck at the fresh green leaves of a lilac bush which grew beside the path. "I don't see how it can make Watt do anything but hate me to know that father could save Comorn if he would, and that he won't because he never wants me to leave Avalon. I'd rather come here when Watt and I are married even if Mrs. Beverley would always be the head of the house. I don't want to usurp her place. I shouldn't care if the girls stayed here all their lives; they're the dearest

friends I have. I don't want them to feel that they are losing their home because I'm so selfish I want to take Watt away from them." She was silent a moment, plucking at the lilac leaves again. "Mother," she said at last appealingly, "mother, I don't know how to talk to you or father. You never think my judgment amounts to anything, but I feel sure that if father doesn't offer to save Comorn now that things will never go right with Watt and me again."

"I'm sure," said Mrs. Beckford, tossing her head angrily, "I'm sure if I thought Watt Beverley could be contemptible enough to expect Judge Beckford to pay his father's debts and lift the mortgage from his home, I'd be glad if the engagement were broken off to-day. But I must say I think you are doing Watt a great injustice. I believe, and your father believes, that Watt loves you for yourself. Perhaps he doesn't, perhaps you are right and we are wrong, perhaps he's only cared for the judge's money which he knew would all be yours some day."

"Oh, mother, don't talk so," the girl protested. "It isn't the money Watt cares about. He'd be just as fond of me if father hadn't a penny. That isn't it."

"Then what is it?" Mrs. Beckford demanded.

"It's that father might help and yet will look on and never offer to save Comorn when he knows that I love Watt. Watt will believe that I'm utterly selfish and shallow, that I don't really care." She paused again, her little hands opening and closing convulsively in mingled despair and appeal. "If I can't say to Watt now that I don't want his Uncle Jim to answer that letter till I've spoken to father, if I can't say that to Watt I'd rather not see any of them again to-day. I'd rather wait out here until the carriage comes."

"I believe you'd rather live here than at Avalon," Mrs. Beckford complained. "But you certainly must not involve your father in this matter until I've spoken to him about it. I think this is the very best thing that could happen. If you were older you would think so, too. Be sensible and come in now and say good-by to Mrs. Beverley and

the girls and we'll go home and talk to your father. Perhaps he'll do what you wish. But don't promise anything that might involve him now. Nonsense, Polly, you must come. It would never do for you to leave without saying good-by. Mrs. Beverley would think it very strange. You must come, Polly, I insist."

All that Polly remembered as they were driven rapidly away from Comorn was that she herself had not spoken one word to Watt or to his mother, and that Watt's hand had been cold, and his clasp the briefest when he had said good-by as he followed them to their carriage.

Mrs. Beckford, now perfectly convinced that the hand of Providence was at work shaping affairs in accordance with her own wishes, sank back luxuriously among the cushions. The girl looked unhappily from the carriage windows. A certain complacency, an arrogance of wealth in her mother's attitude, irritated and oppressed her. She would have preferred to share the vicissitudes of those she loved. There was ill breeding, she felt, in being thus calmly superior to the misfortunes of those so dear to her. She did not think that Mrs. Beverley would have felt as her mother seemed to feel if their places had been reversed.

As the carriage approached Comorn Old Gate, John Brent stepped from the road and lifted his hat. Rance Williams, who was driving, checked the horses. It was not customary for old friends to pass on the road without stopping for a word.

"It's John Brent," Polly exclaimed, brightening for a moment.

"Don't stop, Rance. Drive on," Mrs. Beckford said hastily. To her daughter she added: "We've no time to stop now, and I'd rather you wouldn't call to him, Polly." She confined her own recognition of John to a stiff bow, the chill of which was lost neither upon the young man nor her daughter. Polly sat back in her corner and hated her mother passionately all the way to Avalon.

John Brent shrugged his shoulders and strode on to Comorn Hall.

"Yes, I've heard the news," he said when Ada met him in the doorway. She had come herself in answer to his knock. "The colonel told me when he picked me up near Comorn Old Gate. I came over to see Lorella. I should have gone home, I reckon, but I couldn't, Ada, without seeing Watt and you-all for a minute." Pausing, he looked wistfully about with understanding eyes, eyes that were full of sympathy when they came back to linger fondly upon Ada's face.

"I reckon you-all certainly will miss old Comorn. Beverley's Neck won't seem the same place to me, Ada. I always liked to look across the cove to your beach below the bluff. It helped out when I couldn't see you."

A silence fell. In the drawing-room Colonel Washington was considering business details with Watt and Mrs. Beverley.

"Then there's that three thousand dollars I owe the estate, Jinny, you mustn't forget that. As soon as I can pay that in, and this matter is closed, the estate won't owe a single penny, and there'll be a balance of about five thousand dollars clear to make a fresh start with."

"That money the general and Everard let you have was a loan, James," they heard Mrs. Beverley protesting earnestly. "That has nothing whatever to do with the legal settlement of the estate. It was just a family arrangement. You have repaid it over and over again in kindness to us. The children feel about it just as I do. Some time in the future when your oyster beds begin to pay you can give it to the children if you wish. But you must not regard it as a debt or think of troubling about it now."

"A debt's a debt," the colonel answered. "It's all on record at the court-house, I filed it with the rest of the accounts. Next time I see that rascal Macie I'm going to ask him to raise the money for me. I want to get it off my conscience."

John turned to the open door.

"Do you mind coming outside, Ada? Watt won't want to see me now, I'd only interrupt your uncle."

They passed into the sunshine and went slowly down the long flight of worn stone steps. John saw how firm and full

and beautiful the girl's hand was as it lingered caressingly on the iron railing which guarded the steps. It was more than three months since he had seen her. He was sure that every day made her more beautiful. There were still slight traces of the tears which had come to her eyes when she knew that Comorn was to pass from them.

Insensibly they turned into the path which led away under the cedars toward the burying-ground.

"You haven't been at the Hall for a long time, John," Ada said at last.

"It's been a long time, Ada," he answered. "You know I've had my hands full with the farming, and it's less and less safe to leave mother alone. She often comes with me into the fields when I'm plowing or planting, or into the woods when I'm at work there. Somehow she seems to know if I leave the place. She's always restless, Aunt Jane says, when I'm away."

"But she is well? I mean she is quite as strong as she was, and as cheerful and happy?"

"Oh, yes, better, I think, in every way. Sometimes it seems to me when I see her sitting at the old piano, that she'll look up from the keys and be just like all of us, that her memory will come back to her. Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing if it did?"

"Yes, John. I've always hoped it, and you hope it, too."

"I wouldn't say that, I reckon; I'd be afraid to hope so much," he answered seriously.

"But we can hope it. Wonderful things do happen in this world sometimes. They happen oftener than people think. Why shouldn't they happen to you, too?"

He did not answer at once. When she looked at him she saw that his brows were knitted and frowning.

"Every one says you've done splendid things with the land at Brentwood. I hear you are one of the best farmers in the county."

He smiled at once as she had meant he should.

"I only wish I were," he answered heartily. "If I cou'

make farming pay I wouldn't envy any man on earth, I don't care how many millions he might have. I'd lay acre to acre till I owned all of Brent's Neck again, and then I'd get out on horseback and watch the crops grow."

"You love it all, don't you, John?" she asked, happy in his eager interest.

"Yes, from the first tree down till the last stump is up and you're dropping the corn in the mellow land. The one thing I want is to see the land getting better and better every year."

"That's just as I've always felt about our land," Ada said, catching the infection of his enthusiasm. "I've always felt that it was the duty of each generation to leave the land better than they found it, that if we loved it and used it well it would help us in return. I hope whoever has it after us will love every acre of it as I do."

They were near the burying-ground now, at the edge of the plateau. As Ada spoke, she paused and looked off over the stretch of lowlands, then back toward Comorn and beyond to the woods by Comorn Old Gate, and then her glance rested upon the monuments in the little enclosure, and for the second time that day her gray eyes filled with tears.

"How shall we ever leave them here?" she said.

They passed through the iron gate and stood among the graves. The myrtle grew deep between the monuments, everywhere save on the paths, which were trimly kept and white with broken shells.

"Of course," Ada said at last in an unsteady voice, "this spot will always be ours. Mother will reserve a right of way so that we can come as often as we please. It will be hard to part with Comorn, but we could never, never part with this."

John made no reply. And presently she asked if he had seen Mrs. Beckford and Polly as he approached.

"You must have passed them as you came in. Did they speak to you about the sale?"

"I saw them, but they didn't stop at all," John said. "I suppose they were in a hurry to get home to tell the judge."

"They didn't stop, not to shake hands or ask about your mother?"

John shook his head.

"No, they didn't stop." He hesitated a moment and then spoke quickly as if to relieve his mind of a great burden. "I don't know what's the matter, Ada, but I seem to be losing all my friends. Doctor Carniel doesn't change, nor Mrs. Beverley, nor your Uncle Jim; but Watt has changed, and Agnes, and Mrs. Beckford and Polly, and the Washington boys, too. At first I didn't notice it as I do now. When I was a boy every one was kind to me and I didn't realize how matters stood. Then people didn't hold me responsible, but now they do."

"Hold you responsible for what?" Ada asked. "I don't know what you mean, John."

"I mean they didn't hold me responsible for my birth. I don't even know my own father's name. I don't suppose I ever shall unless mother's memory returns to her. He must have died before mother came home to Brentwood, or he would never have let her come alone. If he had been living he would certainly have followed her when he read about the hotel burning, for her name was in the papers then. That was more than twenty years ago, but in all these years not one word has been heard from him, nor about him. It isn't likely that anything ever will be heard after so long a time. When mother came back to Brentwood people must have talked and wondered, and then for a long time I suppose they forgot about us and talked of other things. But they're talking about us again. They're talking about me. I know it. I feel it in the air. I see it in their faces. They wouldn't condemn poor mother when her mind had broken and they wouldn't condemn me when I was a little boy and didn't understand, but now that I'm a man the old doubt falls on me. They do condemn me now, and if I don't clear up the whole thing somehow it will cling to me like a shadow all my life. You know it, Ada; you've seen it, and felt it, even if you haven't heard it. The last time Cousin Bessie was at

Brentwood she hinted that I ought to go up north. She said I'd have a better chance up there than I could ever expect to have down here. I knew what she was thinking of."

"You go north, leave Brentwood, John! Oh, never! never!" Ada cried in protest. "How cruel of Miss Bessie. She knows you could not leave your mother even if you wished to go. My poor, poor John!" she added gently. "Some day you'll find a clue and then you'll follow it and learn your father's name and everything there is to know; and not one thing you'll not be glad and proud to know. Try to be patient until then."

"I could be patient," he answered, taking the hands she held toward him and holding them fondly in his firm clasp. "I'm not worrying about myself, Ada. I'm not afraid of anything I ought to face. But when they strike at my mother—" He paused abruptly.

"I know. I understand," she whispered.

"She hasn't one defense, not one. She's like some harmless wild thing in its nest that doesn't know enough to run away, but would lie still and helpless until it died of terror. She never has grown old, nor used to things. Even if I should find a clue sometime how could I leave her to follow it unless"—he paused and looked at Ada, with a great pride shining in his eyes—"unless you were my wife, and living there at Brentwood with her. Then I wouldn't fear. Then I'd go to the end of the world, for I'd be certain that everything would be all right when I got back. But you're the only one I'd trust."

"You do trust me, John?" she asked.

"Just as much as I love you," he answered with simple tenderness.

"And you do love me?" she asked, having her own deep need of his assurance.

"Love you, Ada!" He laughed outright, a free boyish laugh which showed how foreign care and anger were to his real nature. "Love you, Ada, I love you every minute of my life. I've loved you ever since I can't remember when, with all

my heart and soul and every drop of blood that's in me. I've loved you every way I ever heard of loving, and I've loved you a heap more than all of that, I reckon. I haven't told you so, at first because I was afraid, and then because I saw how matters stood with me, and I thought I'd better wait till I had a real name to offer you, not just my mother's name and this great doubt. But, Ada, Ada, after all a man can't offer more than everything he has. You knew I loved you."

"Yes," she answered honestly, "yes, I knew, at least I hoped. I wanted you to love me, John, so much, so much."

"You've loved me, too, Ada?"

"Always, John."

He took her in his arms and drew her to him in a close and fond embrace. As she clung to him he kissed her once, and once again.

"John," she said, "I'll go with you to Brentwood any day or hour you want me. John," she murmured, "John, you want me, John?"

"Want you," he cried. "Oh, Ada, Ada, how I have wanted you. You never can know how much I have wanted you, nor how I've needed you. You'd go with me, Ada—you'd be my wife?"

"To-day, to-morrow, or I'll wait one year or ten. Time doesn't matter, does it, John?"

"It's love that matters most," he answered. "But time does matter, too, time to be happy. I want a lot of time for that. I want year after year with you. I don't want anything but you, and my mother and old Brentwood. But I want lots and lots of what I want. We'll have to wait, but not one day longer than we must. No, we'll have to wait. They shan't go whispering things about your husband, Ada. That would drive me mad. You must not even promise to marry me until I can go to Watt and tell him just exactly who I am and what I am."

"John," she said earnestly, "no matter what may hap-

pen, you hear me, dearest John, no matter what, whenever you say that you have come for me, that moment I am ready. And from this moment until that hour, and every moment that I live, I love you and am yours."

To his surprise she drew his head down, kissing him solemnly, with infinite tenderness.

"Ada, Ada," he said very gently, "my dear, dear girl."

They stood holding each other's hands in silence. Insensibly he knew that some great compassion for him filled her heart, something which might have been akin to pity but that her pride in him would have rejected such an emotion as unworthy. He knew that her great desire was to stand beside him and support him in the face of some peril which she saw but which he could not see. He felt the words which had pledged her to him were irrevocable. She was his betrothed. Even more, she was his champion.

"Ada, you know something, something that I don't know. You've heard some talk I haven't heard. Tell me what it is?"

"No, John," she said, and he saw that she had suddenly grown pale. "No, John. You wouldn't have me spoil this time which is so happy for us both. Leave false and cruel things to false and cruel people. I will fight your battles if you'll let me, John, but I will not be tale-bearer for your enemies."

It was so like her that he smiled outright, and brushed a world of enemies away with a gesture which left his arms wide open to enfold her.

"That's right," he laughed. "That's right, Ada. But one thing you've got to promise me, for your own sake and mine. No one but your mother is to know how matters stand between us until I can offer you a name with something more than John Brent to it."

"Make it John Brent, attorney," she laughed, "or Farmer John Brent, or just Mister John Brent, and I'll be satisfied."

But John was serious.

"It's got to be something after Brent," he said.

"Make it John Brent, Esquire, of Brentwood," Ada laughed gaily. "I don't care what it is so long as it's my own John Brent, my dear John Brent, my dear, dear John."

In her new mood of ownership she would have contested the point with him, but fearing he might renew his questioning she at last consented to make a confidante only of her mother.

Then slowly, with many happy pausings here and there for final serious words and tender fond admissions and assurances, Ada led the way back to Comorn Hall, forgetful for the moment that the iron hand of change, which reaches everywhere, had fallen heavily upon her house, and cast its dark shadow on the young man at her side.

CHAPTER IV

THE COLONEL RAISES MONEY

Several letters passed between Colonel Washington and his correspondent in Canada, and in due time Colonel Macie took part in effecting the transfer of Comorn Hall from Mrs. Beverley and her children to Mrs. Mary Horton Brent, Doctor Brent having written that he wished to pay this compliment to his wife.

Colonel Macie had been, of course, suggested and urged upon Colonel Washington by the indefatigable Miss Bessie as the only attorney to represent the absent purchaser. To this Colonel Washington had consented, despite his very hearty dislike of the carpetbagger, as it seemed to him that such an arrangement might simplify the adjustment of the mortgage which Colonel Macie held.

Colonel Washington had also an ulterior motive.

Driving over to Burnt Quarter one day before the conclusion of the transfer to discuss certain details, he brought up the subject of his own indebtedness to the Beverley estate.

"A good many years ago," he said, reluctantly baring his one and only family skeleton to the steely eyes of Miss Bessie's prospective husband, "at a time, sir, when I was exceedingly hard pressed for ready money, old General Beverley and his son, between them, advanced me two thousand dollars and wouldn't even take my note for it. That money saved my life, sir, saved my life. While General Beverley lived he wouldn't hear to receiving a penny of interest, and afterward Everard Beverley wouldn't either. Of course, I put the transaction down in black and white when I filed an accounting of the whole estate. Now, sir, here comes this chance to sell Comorn and clear up everything. What I want to do, is to raise a loan of four thousand dollars on Piccadilly. That amount

will enable me to pay my debt to the estate, with interest at six per cent. from the time the loan was made, and it will leave a little over, maybe, to clear up some trifling debts that have been bothering me. And I'd be able to do my share toward the new roof for old Weyanoke.

"You'll be receiving twelve thousand dollars in cash when this Comorn business is closed, and I wondered if you wouldn't be glad to reinvest some of it in a six per cent. mortgage on Piccadilly. You couldn't have better security, and it's the only way on earth I see to settle my indebtedness to the Beverley estate."

The contemplation of Colonel Washington's family skeleton left Colonel Macie outwardly unmoved. Perhaps he had been aware of its existence all along. Most people in Northmoreland County who enjoyed the colonel's acquaintance had been made aware of it. The colonel's fault had never been secretiveness.

"How long would you want this mortgage to run?" the money-lender asked.

"The longer the better, sir, the longer the better," the prospective borrower replied. "My oyster beds will soon be bringing in a heap of money. Say three or four years. That should give them all the time they'll need to grow. You can't hurry an oyster much, I reckon." And the colonel laughed heartily at his own joke.

Colonel Macie held coolly aloof from the contagion of Colonel Washington's good humor.

"It's just possible," he said slowly, as he made meaningless figures upon a sheet of paper which lay before him on his desk, a trick he had acquired to occupy his shifty eyes when they held more than he cared to have revealed, "it's just possible that I can arrange this loan for you."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Colonel Washington. "It will be a load off my mind, I can tell you."

"I had pretty well settled what I'd do about the reinvestment of the Comorn mortgage," Colonel Macie continued, "and I tell you frankly, four thousand dollars is so near the

actual value of your property that I would not care to loan so much upon it. But since I have been in correspondence with Doctor Brent, it has come out that he will have a good deal of money to invest in the course of a few months and he has asked me to let him know if I heard of any safe investments in this county. It seems to me I can put this matter before him in such an attractive way that he'll be glad to take it up. Piccadilly adjoins Comorn, the security is good, and if anything did happen he could buy it in and add it to his property."

Colonel Washington controlled his resentment with no little difficulty.

"Nothing is going to happen, sir," he answered with some heat. "My oyster beds are as certain as the Bank of England. But you say Doctor Brent won't have this money in hand for some months yet. What I wanted was to settle up everything. It's all hung on so long it's begun to worry me."

"I can do this," said Colonel Macie, after a pause in which he made more penciled figures on the sheet of paper: "I can advance this money on a mortgage with the understanding that Doctor Brent will take it off my hands as soon as his affairs are settled. From what he writes me it's only a matter of two or three months at the most, depending on the sale of some property he has in Montreal, and the closing up of an estate; his uncle's, I gather. It seems he has inherited a good deal of money recently. I'll write him about it, if you say so, but I don't think for myself I'd care to lend so much on Piccadilly."

Had the money-lender's eyes been upon Colonel Washington's face and not upon the figures he was drawing, he would have seen that that gentleman was regarding him with frank disfavor.

"How soon do you reckon you can let me know about it positively?" Colonel Washington asked, rising. Business details were always irksome to him. He would cheerfully spend hours in considering the finances of Weyanoke Church, or in advising the county treasurer, but when it came to his own

affairs he gave them scant attention. "I want this thing closed up before Mrs. Beverley gets wind of it and tries to stop me. The Beverleys haven't a practical hair in their heads," declared the colonel, who considered himself the most practical of men.

"If I write Doctor Brent to-day I should hear from him in a week or ten days surely," Colonel Macie answered.

When his visitor had gone he wrote to Doctor Brent, advising him to make the loan which he considered equivalent to acquiring the property at the face value of the mortgage, as it was most unlikely that Colonel Washington could ever pay it off.

Ten days later Colonel Washington chanced to meet Colonel Macie at the post-office at Weyanoke Cross Roads.

"Just the man I want to see," said Colonel Macie; "I've got a letter here from Doctor Brent."

"What does he say about that loan on Piccadilly?" Colonel Washington asked with some anxiety.

"He says if I'll make the loan for two years at six per cent., he'll agree to take it over in two or three months' time."

The master of Piccadilly drew a long face.

"Two years," he said doubtfully. "Two years isn't very long for such a loan to run."

"I don't doubt you can have it renewed," Colonel Macie assured him. "Of course, I have no authority to promise such a thing, but it's usually done. You know I've extended the loan on Comorn two or three times already, and I'd have done it again, I presume, if this sale hadn't come along."

"When will Doctor Brent be ready to close the Comorn deal?"

"At once," Colonel Macie replied.

And so the two transactions were concluded at the same time. Doctor Brent, pleading his temporary lack of ready money, gave thirteen thousand dollars cash, leaving five thousand dollars secured by a first mortgage on the property. This sum he agreed to pay to Mrs. Beverley one year from the date of the purchase.

With the amount obtained by mortgaging his beloved Piccadilly, Colonel Washington settled the last outstanding debts against the estate of Colonel Beverley. The five thousand dollars still due on Comorn would be Mrs. Beverley's and her children's without any encumbrance whatever.

"You'll have that much to start with anyhow. It's precious little, but it's just that much better than nothing."

"And you mortgaged Piccadilly to do this!" cried Mrs. Beverley.

"I owed the money," said the colonel.

"You owed no such sum," Mrs. Beverley insisted earnestly. "I've heard you say a hundred times it was two thousand dollars. These debts which you have paid amount to more than three. Look, Watt, you see they do."

"You haven't reckoned up the interest," said the colonel. "I always told you, Watt, your mother wasn't any business woman."

"Does my sister know of this—does Maria know what you have done, Jim?" Mrs. Beverley demanded.

"I reckon so, Jinny," Colonel Washington admitted. "She had to sign the papers."

"Then she will never forgive us," cried Mrs. Beverley, deeply distressed, "I know she won't."

"She was just as anxious to have this all cleared up as I was," the colonel protested. "She'll tell you so herself."

"There's one thing you can do, mother," Ada said. "You can pay off the mortgage which Uncle Jim has put on Piccadilly just as soon as Doctor Brent makes the last payment on the Hall. In that way there can't be any risk of uncle's losing Piccadilly."

"Who's talking about losing Piccadilly," cried her uncle, very much put out. "I don't reckon I'll let any one take Piccadilly for four thousand dollars while I can make buckle and tongue meet. Don't you-all worry about me. I never expect to see the sheriff at my door unless I send for him!"

Soon after the sale the Reverend Mr. Braxton wrote to Doctor Brent, congratulating him upon his purchase, and alluded

feelingly to the unbroken connection which Comorn had always maintained with Weyanoke Church. He regretted tactfully that the church itself would not be in a more prosperous condition when he should see it for the first time.

Doctor Brent's reply came promptly. He expressed his deep appreciation of Mr. Braxton's civility, and assured the reverend gentleman of his interest in old Weyanoke. He enclosed a check for one hundred dollars, which sum, he said, it would give him much pleasure to contribute annually to the support of the church.

This generous gift, and the offer which accompanied it, became the text of a glowing editorial in the *Rappahannock Oyster Shell*, wherein it was suggested that Doctor J. C. Brent, the distinguished gentleman who had recently purchased classic Comorn Hall, be given an evidence of the warm-hearted appreciation which his new neighbors already felt for him by electing him to fill the existing vacancy in the vestry of Weyanoke Church.

"Great," continued the editorial, "as is the debt which this county, and the State of Virginia, owe to the famous family which has recently parted with its ancient colonial home, yet we must not, in our grief for their departure from their ancestral halls, neglect to give a hearty welcome to the stranger who is so soon to arrive within our gates. The *Rappahannock Oyster Shell* therefore extends a hearty greeting to Doctor J. C. Brent, of Montreal, Canada, the new master of Comorn Hall and its manorial acres; a welcome none the less hearty that he brings the wealth and enterprise of the North to quicken the currents of southern enterprise."

Arriving at this round period as he stood looking over his weekly copy of the *Oyster Shell* in Mr. Thomas Hesketh's dingy little general store at the Cross Roads one evening in June, Judge Beckford paused, and glancing above his spectacles at the assembled loungers, addressed himself to the

company in general somewhat as he might in other days have addressed himself to the gentlemen of a jury.

"What, I ask you, gentlemen, do you reckon Gus Wyatt can be driving at? I'd like to have one of you gentlemen settle that point for me?"

As no oracle arose to meet the judge's necessity, he dropped his legal bearing and, assuming the Jeffersonian simplicity with which he sometimes clothed himself for popular approval, continued: "I haven't known Gus to slop over like this in some time. This ought to be framed and hung up in every white man's house in the county. Yes, sir, and whenever Gus hove in sight the children should be taught to run out and recite it to him word for word. We ought to have this printed in the first reader so that every child in the public schools could get a chance to know what tall talk really is. What's Gus expect to get out of it, I wonder."

As Judge Beckford spoke, Mr. Hesketh turned away to show a pair of heavy boots to a customer who had entered during the reading and who still hesitated in the region of the door, seeking rather to lose himself in the background of the dimly-lighted picture than to court the critical eye of the public in the more brightly lighted foreground near the counter.

Being detected by the judge's restless glance in an unsuccessful attempt to barricade himself behind an empty sugar barrel, the newcomer apologetically waved his right hand toward what should have been the top of his hat, but which was indeed only a wide aperture through which his disheveled and fast-graying hair obtruded perpendicularly.

"Evening, Judge," he said in a soft propitiatory voice, "evening, gentlemen all."

A sly twinkle appeared furtively in a corner of Judge Beckford's eye. It is possible that the shadow of a fleeting wink might have been detected by a close observer. But his tone was full of serious solicitude as he asked:

"Well, and how are you, Murphy, inside and out?"

"I ain't real well, Judge," the poor white answered. "No, sir, I ain't been real well since I seen you last."

"He keeps a-complaining, Judge," said Grandpa Bird, who had followed his son into the store. "Murphy ain't never so sick he can't complain, I declare he ain't."

Grandpa Bird was a withered relic of antiquity who still retained, despite his more than fourscore years, a disconcerting, cerie juvenility. An ancient boyishness invested Grandpa Bird, a jaunty age. He might have run and leaped and danced beside Methuselah, so very old and yet so very young he seemed.

"I'm glad to hear it," the judge replied, giving his full attention for the space of a disconcerting moment to Grandpa Bird. "As long as he can complain you know you've got him with you."

"I don't see no grounds for to gainsay you, Judge, no, sir, I declare I don't," assented Grandpa Bird.

"I've heard," the judge said, turning again to Murphy Bird, "that you tried a new doctor last summer. I hoped to have a better account of you."

"Yes, sir, I did try new medical treatment last year," the poor white said, rising willingly to the bait. "It was a female lady doctor from the North that spent the summer season up in Redshin. She came a-dosing down this-a-way an' I took an' carried my case to her. She seen I wasn't able to stand up hardly, nor to do a lick of work. She said she'd tend my case if Mis' Bird'd do her washing, an' it seemed like the Lord's hand was into hit. She sent her wash an' took right hold an' had me into bed an' on my back, an' drugged me like to kill a horse. An' wash kep' a-getting bigger an' bigger, till Mis' Bird was most tuckered out. That lady doctor had her eye onto a widower gentleman summer boarder from Baltimore, an' Mis' Bird washed an' washed an' kep' her looking like the driven snow, until she'd washed her right into that widower gentleman's arms. I know, for certain parties seen her there. The next we heard she'd gone north with the widower gentleman, an' I thought it showed that heartless

in her not to stay over to see me laid away, that I was real provoked about it, an' I quit her drugs right then an' thar. It looked like the Lord was onto my side, an' it seemed I wasn't called. I lingered, an' I'm a-lingering yet. Yes, sir, it was a female lady doctor from the North that took my case last year, an' I ain't sure into my mind whether she saved my life or liked to kill me drugging me the way she done."

"What you need to do, Murphy," Judge Beckford said, the twinkle deepening in his eye, "what you need to do is to take things easy and to give your health a chance."

"Ain't it the truth," said Mr. Bird with deep conviction. "Yes, sir, peace an' quiet's what I need. Just peace an' quiet is all a body needs to ask for into this world. It's a heap more'n he'll ever get, I reckon."

He sighed gently.

"When a body marries he may be that peaceable he'd take off his hat to a potato bug, an' say 'sir' to a land tarrapin, but there ain't no quiet into the house once his wife gets there an' takes hold. A married lady don't feel she's doing her full duty by a quiet man if she ain't a-raising a dust an' a disturbance from sun-up to bedtime."

• "I declare she don't," said Grandpa Bird.

Feeling perhaps that grandpa's assent made all further demonstration needless, or that he had dwelt too long upon a painful topic, Mr. Bird changed to more general ground.

"Sheep flies been awful this spring, ain't they? An' it's the tickiest year ever I seen. Seems to me you can't walk six steps from your door but you got to stop in your tracks an' tick yourself just like you was a dog that had been chasing young rabbits through a patch of briers. I declare I been scratching so much I ain't got no strength left for handling a hoe. The jigger bites an' the sand flies together like to drove me wild. It seems to me sometimes like I can't think for itching. I don't see what the Lord ever made 'em for. It's just itch an' scratch from the middle of May right round to the end of September. An' as soon as jiggers and skeeters is gone, along comes the frost an' chilblains. Scratch and

freeze, that's it. A body ain't never got no peace into this world noways, an' hell a-coming after if a body don't watch out. An' when you got worry onto your mind, an' you're convinced of sin, you might as well give up right where you stand an' quit. But there ain't no way to do it."

"There's a heap of horse-sense into what Murphy's just throwed down from his haymow, I declare there is," Grandpa Bird agreed with sprightly animation.

With no desire to throw light upon Mr. Bird's spiritual perplexities, but to determine the presence of red ants in a sugar barrel, Mr. Hesketh had brought the lamp forward and placed it on a corner of the counter, where it shone directly upon the gaunt form of the poor white.

Revealed thus clearly, Mr. Bird's countenance had an appearance of mental dilapidation in perfect harmony with those external evidences of a similar character which he so consistently affected.

The bones of Mr. Bird's mental fabric, like the bones of his powerful frame, were strong and in place, but he had draped them with such an assortment of ignorances that his natural common sense was at times almost obscured.

Mr. Bird had a soul; for a long time he mistook it for malaria. He at last decided that it was liver complaint, but as it was neither, he derived but little benefit from the perpetual dosing he gave himself, and his soul continued to prey upon him.

Mr. Bird had the heart of a knight errant and the initiative of a shiftless poor white. He had the generosity of a philanthropist, but the burdens of a man of family who earned a dollar a day now and then when he worked. On great occasions, if sufficiently infrequent, Mr. Bird could, would and did toe the mark, but at all other times he lagged behind. Mr. Bird was as shy as a fawn, and as gentle as a summer breeze. He invited calamity to heap itself on his shoulders. Yet somewhere within Mr. Bird there lingered a lion. Given the occasion and he could be formidable indeed; without the occasion there was no more wrath in him than there is in a rabbit.

"What are you doing for a living, these times, Murphy?" the judge asked, eying Mr. Bird with an assumed severity over his gold-rimmed spectacles. "Still tenanting land at Comorn, I presume?"

"I presume so, Judge, I should presume so. We're just a-roosting around at Comorn till the new owner comes and shoos us off, I reckon."

"Like the birds of the air, eh?" suggested the judge.

"I don't know, Judge, I reckon so. But we-all ain't even protected by the game laws." Mr. Bird laughed remotely into the crown of the tattered hat, which he had removed that he might wipe his brow with the back of his knotted hand. This accomplished he looked down at his son, a child of four or five, dressed with some show of neatness, who tagged behind his father, scarcely visible in the dusk of Mr. Hesketh's store.

"You let go of me, Salvadorie," he said complainingly. "Ain't I enough to do to stand up in my tracks without you a-dragging at my coat tails like you was possessed. You let go, I tell you."

But the child still retained its hold upon its father's coat. Mr. Bird glanced apologetically toward Judge Beckford.

"I just pled with Salvadorie to stay home this evening, but he come along just the same. It don't do no manner of good to argue with Salvadorie. We ought to 'a' switched more religion into him. But it's too late to begin now, I reckon. He's past four, an' he's got a will like iron."

"I declare he has," said Grandpa Bird.

"It's his mother's doings," lamented Salvadorie's father. "She never did have no kind of authority over him, an' he screams like he would raise the dead if I as much as take a switch to him. I ain't never been able to frail him out like I ought to 'a' done. I think his stomach's weak, and that mostly spoils their heads. If I was to do my duty by him I'd carry him to Doctor Carniel an' have his health examined."

"He's real little for his size, ain't he?" asked Grandpa Bird. "I declare if he ain't. But if it was foreordained he was to

grow he'll have to grow, and if it ain't he'll never get his nose past his pap's elbow joint, I declare he won't."

"Grand weather for planting corn, ain't it?" said Mr. Bird. "I disremember when I ever see finer weather. I got a field I ought to drap to-morrow. But there ain't no money into raising nothing on the shares. Seems like you don't no more'n get the seed sowed till you got to put the plow to it, an' you ain't got more'n a minute's peace till it's ready to cut. An' husking's an awful tedious job. I've heard it said that a body loses money every time he puts in corn. But what's a pore man to do if he keeps a hog?"

"I declare I don't see," responded Grandpa Bird.

"What this country needs," continued his son, thus encouraged, "is for some real rich man to come in here an' employ labor. Don't seem to me I seen a job in I can't disremember when. I just got to do something about this bill against me here. Credit to the grocery store is a grand thing, but naturally it ain't a-going to last forever. A body can't expect it. I owe six dollars a'ready. It's six dollars ain't it, Mr. Hesketh? Six dollars and sixty-nine cents. Might almost as well be an even seven dollars. I wonder if times is a-going to be any better afore election? Doctor Carniel he wanted me to come over and drap corn all of next week. He's a splendid gentleman, an' he's did well by my spine, first an' last, but I ain't made up my mind as I'd be able to accommodate him. It's a long ways from the beginning of a week's work to the end of a week's work, ain't it? From a Monday morning sun-up to Saturday at quitting time is a heap longer than a body ought to plan for. If it was fore-ordained for to labor such a stretch hit might be put through, but without a body could see some God's will into hit I don't reckon he ought to undertake it single-handed. An' then I got that field of my own to think about, an' Mis' Bird she burns up more firewood into our cook stove than any woman I ever see. I can't keep even with her nohow," he sighed.

"It's hard to see honest labor go up in stove smoke an' nothing to show for it but a taste of salt fish an' a cup of store coffee."

He paused to try on the pair of coarse boots which Mr. Hesketh had pushed across the counter to him with an indifferent: "Those ought to be about your size, Murphy, biggest I got in stock."

"Plenty for your money, any way," the judge commented.

Mr. Bird took up the boots and regarded them with evident discouragement. "Them boots is so heavy I don't see how I'm a-going to lift one foot after another into 'em."

Salvadorie drew his parent down and whispered in his ear. Mr. Bird appeared to hesitate but, his son's iron will prevailing, he turned uneasily to Mr. Hesketh. "If I was to get a stick of that there horehound candy in the glass jug next them lamp chimneys for Salvadorie would you charge it to my account, or would you feel safer to charge it up against gran'pap? If you was to set it against my score it'd make an even six dollars an' seventy cents, the way I figure it out. Salvadorie's stomach's so bad I reckon it can't do it no harm an' he'll have to leave go my coat tails while he eats it. I don't know how I'd manage to get home if he was to hang onto me. You got any seed potatoes, Judge? I thought some of putting in a crop. I ain't never had no kind of luck with potatoes, but it'd give Salvadorie something to do to bug the vines. There's your stick of candy, son, and now you leave me be. Ain't you a-coming, gran'pap? Evening, Judge; evening, gentlemen all."

Salvadorie, contrary to Mr. Bird's expressed conviction, contrived by taking the brown stick firmly in his left hand still with his right hand to cling tenaciously to the tails of his father's coat.

"Goodness, lord!" cried Grandpa Bird. "He ain't let go. My! ain't that child got a will of iron."

Mr. Bird cast a saddened and discouraged glance behind him, comprehended the situation and, resigning himself to the inevitable, departed without further words down the

rickety steps of Mr. Hesketh's store into the warm spring night, closely followed by Grandpa Bird.

"I reckon," said Judge Beckford as he folded his copy of the *Rappahannock Oyster Shell* and stuffed it in his sagging pocket, "I reckon Gus Wyatt's trying to sell an interest in the *Oyster Shell* to that Canadian Yankee. There's more than one way to make a living in this world, eh, Brother Hesketh?"

In departing Judge Beckford left the door ajar that he might the more readily mount to his seat in the buggy which stood waiting for him. Rance Williams, Lorella's faithless husband, surrendered the lines as the judge settled himself in his seat.

"Keep them, keep them, Rance," said the judge. "It's no pleasure for me to drive unless I can see the road and send the horses along. The stars don't let in much light going through the woods our way. I see you've got the lantern lighted. Hang it out so we won't run into any one, and then we'll put away for Avalon."

The judge was eager to show Mrs. Beckford the editorial in Gus Wyatt's paper. He would not have admitted it to himself but he nourished a small secret resentment against the purchaser of Comorn Hall.

He more than half regretted now that he had not lifted the mortgage, for while he shared Mrs. Beckford's determination that Polly should not leave Avalon, he really sought his daughter's happiness, and Watt Beverley shorn of Comorn was not Watt Beverley at all. The judge could not remember a time when Polly had been so miserably unhappy as she had since the sale of Comorn. It was some comfort to him to think how unmercifully he would ridicule Gus Wyatt for his fulsome editorial the next time he met him.

The truth was that the Honorable Augustus Wyatt, being exceedingly hard pressed for ready money, and having failed in other quarters, had written to the northern *Cresus* offering him a one-third interest in his valuable paper at what he chose to call a very reasonable price. The price would

have been reasonable enough if the *Oyster Shell* had possessed the circulation, the advertisements or the influence which the Honorable Gus, as his friends always called him, claimed for it.

Almost as much to the surprise as to the delight of the struggling editor and politician, his offer had been accepted. The matter was concluded through Colonel Macie, the new part-owner of the *Oyster Shell* stipulating only that he should be a silent partner. It was because of this transaction that the Honorable Gus had felt called upon "to use a little English," as he expressed it, for the glorification of Doctor J. C. Brent, of Comorn Hall.



CHAPTER V

OLD HENRIETTA

One wild night, as the first heavy thunder-storm of the season rolled westward above the tree-tops, a sharp knock sounded on the door of Hamp Sam's cabin, and a harsh imperious voice called his name; opening the door, Hamp started back as though he had seen a ghost of his old master standing upon the threshold.

"Mammy! Mammy Hetty! Great God A'mighty, am that you?" he cried, staring at the gaunt and ragged form which, drenched by the rain, stood towering in the doorway. "Lord, lord, I never did expect to set eyes on you again this side of Jordan."

"Where's Caroline Matilda?" the woman demanded, her eyes searching the recesses of the dimly lighted room.

Hamp shivered and drew back.

"Caroline Matilda she's dead and in her grave. Come on inside and let me shut the do'."

He thrust the door back with his foot and closed the door.

"When Caroline Matilda die?" his mother asked as she stalked toward the fire where she stood warming her long skinny hands.

"She die more'n ten years ago."

"An' yo' ain't married since?"

Hamp shook his head.

"You showed your sense," she said.

"Where you been all this time since you done went away? 'Deed I thought you was in glory."

"I been a-traveling up the land and down the land. But I ain't come back to answer no fool questions. Ain't you gwine to give your old mammy no supper? I wants some hot supper an' a bed, that's what I wants."

She turned from the fire and looked intently at Lorella who, having removed the apron with which in her first alarm she had covered her head, now stood speechless and staring.

"This ought to be yo' child, Lorella. My, my, she do favor her ma, Caroline Matilda."

Her roving eye detected Tiger.

"Who's that rusty looking young nigger in the corner there?" she demanded sternly.

"That's Tiger," said his father, but without any show of pride in the announcement. "Tiger he was born after you went away."

"Doan' seem to me I much like his looks, 'deed I doan'; but I reckon he'll look better by daylight. He ain't much by lamplight, 'deed he ain't. I never did like a rusty nigger nohow."

Her appraising and impartial gaze fell on her son.

"You'se just as speckled as you ever was, ain't you, Hamp? Albemiums don't change none, an' that's the Lord's truth."

She turned and turned the tattered shawl she held spread out before the fire until the steam rose from it.

"It's a long road that doan' lead home, ain't it?" she asked of vacancy. "I've had a wandering foot in my time, an' it's carried me far, but I always knowed I'd come back to bleach my bones in old Northmoreland County. What's in the cupboard thar?"

Such was the homecoming of Old Hetty, Hamp Sam's mother.

In her day and time Old Hetty had been an influence to reckon with in the negro cabins of Beverley's Neck. In her youth she had been noted far and wide for her great beauty. An unruly slave at Brentwood, she had been indulged by her master, over whom she exercised a marked ascendancy. The second Mrs. Brent, resenting the influence which the woman so evidently held, was not content until she had induced Doctor Brent to sell Hetty and her handsome son, Julius Cæsar, to General Beverley. Hetty had remained at Comorn until Lincoln freed the slaves. Later she disappeared from the neigh-

borhood and was not seen again until some time after Doctor Brent's death.

After some restless shifting from place to place, she had finally elected to settle in a cabin on the Comorn property, where her second son, Hamp Sam, had meanwhile established himself. Imperious and revengeful, she had been accused of many whispered crimes. She was at last compelled to leave the neighborhood by the sheriff, who was forced to overturn the little cabin in which she lived in order to dislodge her.

Attributing her troubles to the activities of Judge Beckford, then the commonwealth's attorney of Northmoreland County, she set fire to a barn on his plantation and fled the country.

Old Hetty had long been forgotten, save on wild winter nights when the negroes recalled her threats and prophecies, or when a burning barn sent up its lurid flame against the midnight sky and they whispered, "Somebody's doing Hetty's work to-night." Her son Hamp thought her dead. It was hardly to be wondered then that her unexpected return threw Lorella into the highly nervous state which invariably heralded one of her mysterious attacks.

The third day after his mother's arrival Hamp Sam sent Tiger to the Cross Roads in hot haste to summon Doctor Carniel. "Lorella certainly was took terrible again."

"So you think it was your grandmother's coming home that startled Lorella and brought on this attack?" the doctor asked when Tiger had told his story.

"'Deed I done reckon so," the boy answered. "The old woman she done come in like she was a ghostus, with the thunder a-booming an' a-busting fit to split the roof, an' the lightning a-snaking itself up an' down the sky. When pap let her in I certainly thought she was the devil. 'Deed I don't much like that old woman nohow."

"Oh, you'll come to like her better when you get to know her," Doctor Carniel said hopefully. "Who's taking care of Lorella now?" he asked with some concern.

"Sometimes pap's mother sets with her, an' sometimes Mignonette Jackson she comes over and sets with her when she

ain't got nothing else to do, an' pap he sets with her when he ain't working. Miss Ada she brings Lorella chicken broth and port wine, an' sometimes she takes a hand at setting with her, too."

The doctor's buggy being at the gate, he was soon on his way down Beverley's Neck to see the sufferer. As the doctor approached Hamp Sam's cabin John Brent emerged from the woods on the left of the road. He had rowed across the cove, he said, to learn if Watt Beverley would need the Brentwood teams to help with his moving.

"You'd better come in with me and see if Ada's here," the doctor suggested as he stopped before the cabin. "Tiger tells me she's been sitting with Lorella sometimes since this last attack came on."

But Mignonette Jackson was alone in attendance on the invalid. Hamp was at work in a near-by corn-field.

"Old Mis' Brent," Mignonette told them, "was off visiting round, an' Miss Ada she hadn't come yet neither."

"'Deed I don't know whether Lorella's a-getting any better or a-getting any worse. I declare to goodness I believe it would be a mercy if the good Lord was to take an' take her home. She ain't a-doing no good to herself nor to no one else lying stiff an' stark, like she's a-lying, jus' a-staring at the ceiling. An' when she does open her mouth she only keeps a-complaining of a misery in the spine of her back, an' a misery in her head. I reckon old Mis' Brent's comin' home that-a-way, when everybody reckoned she was dead an' buried, an' was satisfied to have it so, did occasion Lorella some inconvenience into her mind. I been a-settin' here a-watching her most all day, an' I'se tired, I is. I ain't wishing Lorella no harm, 'deed I ain't, but it'd be a mercy if the Lord was to take and take her home."

"After all, that's the Lord's business and not ours," Doctor Carniel said as he took the sick girl's hand and sat down beside the bed, closely observant of the dark sallow face with its wide staring eyes, eyes which seemed intent only upon the stained and blackened rafters of the ceiling. Lorella's pulse was

regular, but very faint. Her breathing was labored, at times it seemed to cease entirely.

Presently the doctor shook his head. "Half the time I can't tell whether she is breathing or not," he said. "It looks to me as though she needed some powerful restorative, but her condition is so strange I don't dare to give it."

"Oh, I don't reckon you'd make no mistake," Mignonette said. She had approached and now stood looking down at the unconscious girl upon the bed. Something in her tone arrested John's attention.

"'Deed I don't think nobody could blame you. Doctor, if Lorella was to take an' pass away to-night. I been a-watching her, an' a-watching her, an' every little while she'd quit a-breathing an' lie like she was dead, just like she was dead an' gone to Jesus."

Mignonette's voice was soft and sympathetic, yet something in it made John's flesh creep. It was with relief that he heard Hamp Sam speaking to Ada Beverley beyond the door.

Half an hour later as John walked beside Ada on the path which led to Comorn, Ada said:

"I went down to the beach yesterday morning, John, and tried to signal across to you as we used to do when we were children. I unfurled the sail of Watt's boat, and shook it out three times, but there wasn't any answer from the Brentwood side."

"I had to go to Broken Banks," John answered. "I started early and I didn't get back till late in the afternoon. Was anything the matter yesterday?"

"It's Watt. I'm worried about Watt. He isn't like himself. It breaks his heart to think of leaving Comorn. I know he is unhappy about Polly, too, terribly unhappy. He tells us nothing, but they seem quite changed toward each other since the place was sold. I know Polly feels as though she were to blame for everything. If you meet him to-day be very patient with him, won't you, John? I wish you didn't feel as you do about our telling him. I'm sure he more than half suspects how matters are."

"Poor Watt! I reckon you're right about it; this isn't the time to keep things from him. I'll tell him the first chance I get. When do you leave Comorn, Ada?"

"Day after to-morrow."

"So soon? I didn't think you'd be going for a week, anyway."

"I know. But since I saw you Uncle Jim has heard from Mrs. Brent. She's coming south in advance of her husband. We want to be away before she comes."

"Then you think Watt will need my teams to-morrow?"

"No, we're scarcely taking anything; our trunks, the portraits, the silver, and just the few things mother couldn't leave behind. All the rest goes with the house. There's no need for you to send your teams so far around by road."

As they approached the Hall they met Watt Beverley. He'd been out at the stables, he said, looking about to see that the niggers didn't carry off all the things that were to be left for Doctor Brent. He shook hands cordially enough with John, but a new constraint was in his manner. John did not accept Ada's invitation to enter the house.

"Mrs. Beverley's busy, I'm afraid," he said, "and you should have these last days to yourselves."

"Good-by, then," said Ada, holding out her hand. "We'll see you soon at Piccadilly. Uncle Jim says you owe them a visit, and you'll want to see how we shall all manage after this big house. Good-by."

Her voice had broken at the mention of her home and she ran hastily up the steps and passed through the open door.

When she was gone John Brent turned to Watt Beverley.

"My boat's tied up on the shore back of Comorn Old Gate. Walk a little way with me, won't you, Watt?"

"You met my sister at Hamp's to-day, didn't you?" Watt asked.

Something in his tone told John that their old boyish friendship was forgotten. It might have been a stranger who addressed him.

"Yes, I met Ada there," he answered. "I stopped a moment

with the doctor. Then Ada came and I walked back with her. I wanted to ask if you'd need help about moving down to Piccadilly."

"No. Uncle Jim and I can manage without troubling you," Watt answered coldly.

They walked on in silence. For a moment John did not trust himself to speak. A sense of hot resentment was rising in his heart. At last he said:

"It's a long time, Watt, since you and I have been together. I wish you'd come over and see what I'm doing at Brentwood, after you're settled again."

Watt made no answer. The silence became oppressive.

A little way ahead the tall form of an old negress crossed the path and vanished into a clump of pines which encroached upon the meadow.

"I don't think I'll go any farther," Watt said at last, pausing near the thicket of young pines into which the old negress had disappeared. "I've got to say something to you, and I'd better say it now and get it off my mind. Don't come to Piccadilly while we're there, and don't see Ada again. I've got my reasons."

John faced Watt squarely in the path.

"I've heard you, now you hear me," he said hoarsely. "I asked you to walk a little way because I'd something I wanted to say to you. It's this. I love Ada, I've loved her all my life. The day your uncle brought that letter about the sale of Comorn I learned that Ada loved me, too. Hold on, now. Hear me out. Ada told her mother, but I didn't want her to tell you until I could come to you myself and say, 'I've learned all about my father. He was an honest man and a gentleman.' Until I could say that to you we weren't to be engaged. But Ada said to-day it wasn't fair to keep you in the dark. And so I promised her I'd tell you just how matters stood. It's only right that you should know."

He paused.

"I'm mighty glad I've got that off my mind," he added

almost light-heartedly. "I'm all through. What have you got to say about it, Watt?"

"Not much. Only this. You mustn't see Ada again. I'm sorry, but there's no help for it."

"Not see Ada again! Why, Watt, you're crazy."

"No, I'm not. I know just what I'm saying and why I'm saying it. The whole business ends right here and now. I'm mighty sorry for you; I've got nothing against you personally, but if you knew what's being said about you you wouldn't wonder at the stand I'm forced to take to protect my sister."

"Good God, Watt, what do you mean? What's being said about me? I've got a right to know."

"I'll never tell you," Watt answered. "Get some one else. They all know it, every white man and nigger on the Neck."

"Does Ada know it, too?"

"I suppose she does."

"She doesn't believe it, then?"

"I don't know that. But anyway you'd better not ask her. And if you'll take my advice you'll leave this part of the world for good and all and go up north where blood doesn't count as it does here in Virginia."

"Blood—what's the matter with my blood—you mean—Watt, for God's sake tell me what people say?"

"Ask the niggers."

"The niggers! What have they got to do with me? You've got to tell me now, right here, by God you have!"

He laid his hand upon Watt's shoulder to detain him. Watt shook it off roughly.

"Let go of me," he cried. "I'm not accustomed to let a nigger lay his hands on me."

"A nigger!" And swayed by an impulse of wild rage, John struck him.

"You lie!" he cried. "You lie!"

Watt turned upon John furiously, but before he could retaliate the young pines were parted and Old Hetty stood between them on the path.

"Doan' yo' go for to hit him back, Mr. Watt, doan' yo' touch a hair of his head," she cried fiercely. "Gwine on, gwine on. You-all's lost yo' home! Yo' ain't got no mo' right on this here land than what I is. Gwine on, I tells yo', gwine on about yo' business, an' doan' yo' meddle up with Mr. John again 'less yo' want to reckon with Old Hetty."

"Ask her," Watt cried as he strode away. "She knows. She'll tell you."

John turned to the old negress.

"What does he mean? What do you know about me?" he demanded. "What do people say?"

"Folks is talking a heap about who yo' pa was, honey, 'deed they is."

"Who do they say my father was? Tell me. I'm not afraid to hear."

"'Deed, honey, they do say my yallow boy, Julius Cæsar, was yo' pa. Yo's part black, honey, that's what folkses say. You'se jus' a nigger, that's the talk that's going round. I'se yo' old granny, Hetty, an' Hamp's yo' Uncle Hamp, so folkses say, so folkses say."

As she spoke she leered at John and laughed, and leered again and laughed, while he stood dumb and stricken as the monstrous words assailed his understanding. They seemed to beat upon his temples like heavy hammers, muffled, but merciless. At last, with a gasp, he broke the spell and, turning upon his tormentor, seized her shoulder roughly with his powerful hand, his face blanched to a whiteness that in itself belied the hideous assertion.

"It's a lie!" he cried. "You know it's all a lie. You were a slave at Brentwood, and you know I'm white. If you were a man I'd kill you on the spot. I'm white, you hear me, white!"

He pushed her from him and strode down the path, but her wild laughter followed him.

"White, is yo', honey?" she called mockingly. "Doan' yo' despise yo' nigger kin. Old Hetty only tells yo' what folks say. 'Tain't Hetty's doings that folks calls yo' nigger."

Not daring to look back, he struck off into the thicket to the

right of the road, heedless of the branches that tore his hands, heedless of the roots and fallen logs over which he tripped and stumbled as he hurried on, only conscious of the awful words with which she had assailed him; words with which he now assailed himself.

"Nigger! Nigger! Nigger!"

The crows cawing above the woodland seemed to echo it, and to mock him as he pushed blindly on toward the water. At last when he saw the sparkling surface of the cove through the green leaves he had a wild impulse to rush forward and seek refuge and oblivion in its depths.

Ada knew this. All the whites knew it. All the negroes whispered it. He strode forward, meaning to make some desperate vindication, to endure the horror and the shame no longer, and then he remembered his mother, helpless and mad, his mother, who was waiting for him in the old house at Brentwood, this calumny dishonoring her as it dishonored him.



CHAPTER VI

PICCADILLY

Piccadilly was distant three miles from Comorn. It stood near the shore of the river upon a broad tract of some seven or eight hundred unprofitable acres which had once formed a part of the Beverley possessions. It was a land of broom-sedge, scrub pines, gum trees and sassafras, a land where the frogs piped in summer and the rabbits wrote their hieroglyphics in the winter snows. The fields of Piccadilly were guiltless of fences, but rich in holly trees and laurel bushes. The crows loved it and the foxes called it home. If the winds of heaven blew over a freer spot it was not to be found in all Virginia.

The mansion house of Piccadilly was indefinitely placed in a grove of gaunt locust trees not more than a hundred feet from the brow of a low bluff at the foot of which the tide plashed, or the waves thundered, on the splendid beach. It stood, ugly, bare and unpainted, its weather-boarding peeling away from the framework of the house, its shingles curling in the sun and rotting in the shade, its tall chimneys dangerously out of plumb and crumbling at their tops, its whole aspect witnessing to indifference and neglect, yet Piccadilly was the home of the first citizen of the community, for such Colonel Washington had become upon the death of his kinsman, Everard Beverley, of Comorn Hall.

Colonel Washington needed no genealogy to announce to the world the importance of his ancestry; his name sufficed, but had such a need arisen Mrs. Washington would have met the emergency; for, as the colonel often said, there was not a family tree in Northmoreland County that Mrs. Washington

could not climb like a squirrel. The colonel's position was his birthright; for the rest he enjoyed a record of distinguished and gallant service in the Confederate army. He had been mentioned for special bravery in General Lee's despatches, and had won promotion on the battle-field. The colonel was, of course, a local magistrate, and he grumbled not a little at the duties which the office imposed upon him. It was an unprofitable honor, as he invariably adjusted all matters brought before him in such a way that in the many years he had served as a justice of the peace he had never collected a single fee which could find its way into his own pocket.

When the colonel's neglected acres failed to supply a sufficient income, which was not infrequent, the master of Piccadilly was accustomed to rely upon his mile or two of waterfront, with its oyster beds and fishing privileges, to pull him through. Thus levying tribute, as it were, upon both land and sea, Colonel Washington had lived with perfect independence for many years. Until the mortgaging of Piccadilly he had been comparatively care-free, for he never doubted that his fields and shores would sustain him and all those who might need his aid until that never very distant day when the consolidation of the oyster industry should in some mysterious manner make him a richer man than any of his ancestors.

What Comorn Hall had been to the Beverleys, Piccadilly was to Colonel Washington. It was his home, his principality, his anchorage. It had been a gift, together with its acres and its now vanished slaves, from his father upon his marriage to the lovely Maria Tayloe and, except for the changes incident to the flight of time, it remained exactly as it had left the builder's hands. The years immediately succeeding Lee's surrender had been too grim and crowded to permit the colonel to look to his house for anything but a shelter for himself, his wife and his fast-increasing swarm of youthful Washingtons.

There were few sleeping rooms at Piccadilly and the coming of the family from Comorn Hall occasioned a considerable compression of the Washingtons. Watt, who still remained at Comorn, would, on the arrival of Mrs. Brent, add himself to

the already overflowing but elastic household. The necessary readjustments were effected chiefly by Cousin Page, who was, the colonel claimed, equal to any problem in addition.

Cousin Page occupied a unique position in the household at Piccadilly. It had not occurred to Colonel and Mrs. Washington that they might send their promising sons to the district school and, as it was impossible that the little Washingtons should grow up in ignorance, the colonel, many years before when the oldest son, who bore the honored name of Bushrod, had reached the age when children clamor for their alphabet, had decided to employ a resident instructor.

Page Dinwiddie was a cousin, some three or four times removed, at whose father's house in King William County the colonel had been sheltered and made much of when the armies were in the vicinity of Williamsburg.

There were a number of sons and daughters. Colonel Washington remembered a row of eager rebel faces round a long candle-lighted table in the old plantation house. The war had much reduced these Dinwiddie cousins both in numbers and in fortune, and, hearing from another cousin who, chancing to spend the night at Piccadilly, had waxed warm over his juleps in praise of one Page Dinwiddie, "An accomplished scholar, sir, a credit to our state and people, sir, and very much in need of employment as a teacher," the good colonel without more ado had written off at once to offer Cousin Page Dinwiddie the position of tutor to his son.

When Page Dinwiddie arrived the colonel experienced a sensation of dismay upon beholding, not the young man he expected, but a tall, auburn-haired young woman who kissed him affectionately and called him Cousin James.

The colonel and Mrs. Washington went into executive session the moment they reached the seclusion of their room.

"Oh, Cousin James," cried Mrs. Washington. "Oh, Cousin James, how could you! She's a girl, and young and inexperienced."

Mrs. Washington always called her husband "Cousin James." He had been "Cousin James" to her all through

her girlhood, and "Cousin James" he remained throughout their married life.

"She never will be able to manage Bush. For pity's sake, why didn't you tell me Page Dinwiddie was a girl?"

"How could I tell you when I didn't know it? 'Deed, Maria, I thought she was a man. I swear you could have knocked me down with a feather when I saw her. She had enough brothers when I was at Greenwood, six or seven of them; I couldn't recollect their names, cousin this and cousin that, how was I to know one from another?"

"But when you wrote her father, didn't you say you hoped 'he'd' come, or that you would be glad to see 'him,' or anything about 'his' son Page? Don't you recollect what you wrote, Cousin James?"

"I reckon I just said for Cousin Roswell to send along Page Dinwiddie, that I reckoned Cousin Page was more needed at Piccadilly than at Greenwood. I couldn't have put in a him or a he or she wouldn't be here this minute."

"Who is to tell her it's all a mistake?" Mrs. Washington demanded.

"Nobody that I know of," said her husband.

"Then what are you going to do about it, Cousin James?"

"Nothing at all. Easiest way out of it that I can see."

"But what is Page Dinwiddie to do?"

"Carry out the contract, now she's here. I reckon it's the Lord's doings that she came, perhaps we'd better leave it in His hands, Maria."

"Nonsense!" cried Mrs. Washington, quite out of temper, "the Lord's had nothing to do with it. She'll never be able to manage a boy like Bush. He's so headstrong. Some one certainly must tell her you thought she was her brother."

"Very well, you go ahead yourself and tell her," said the diplomatic colonel.

"Never in this world," declared Mrs. Washington.

The upshot of the matter was that neither the colonel nor Mrs. Washington had the heart to enlighten Cousin Page, and so she remained at Piccadilly in complete unconsciousness

that she had been called providentially rather than intentionally to the great work of educating "Cousin James's" boys.

Educate them, however, the estimable lady did, with a vigor, rigor, resource and thoroughness which the advancing years and added cares were powerless to abate. She taught them their letters, she taught them their "readers," she taught them writing, she taught them their spelling, breaking the hardest word into syllabic fragments which they digested at their ease. She taught them geography, the South the center of the earth and second only to Heaven itself in its salubrious climate, scenic attractions, fertility and general residential advantages; the North the chill abode of uncultivated demons, known as Yankees, where no gentleman ever had or ever could reside, where nobody ever had or ever could have ancestors worthy of even casual mention in polite society.

Asked to describe the Potomac River by Cousin Page, George, the youngest of the colonel's sons, promptly responded: "The grandest body of water on the face of the earth, emptied into by the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean."

She taught them Latin, Greek and French, with such a rich King William County accent and phraseology that Cæsar "reckoned" and "we-all" invaded Gaul, and poor old Priam "certainly did" and lovely Helen "certainly was" to the very end of the chapter.

Beside these sounder branches of learning walked hand in hand the never-to-be-neglected accomplishments, those amiable arts and graces so becoming, even so necessary to the station in life to which, as Cousin James's own dear sons, the ragged, barefoot little Washingtons were called. There were drawing classes and dancing classes and music classes, both vocal and instrumental. Mrs. Washington's piano was an heirloom. No one who ever heard Cousin Page execute the *Siege of Prague* upon it could be in any doubt concerning its antiquity.

"Music" to the entire household at Piccadilly meant Cousin Page seated bolt upright at the piano, her feet firmly planted

upon the complaining pedals, her hands upon the thin and yellow keys, evoking plaintive and discordant protests in forms of *Dixie*, *My Maryland*, *Lorena* and kindred patriotic and sentimental ballads of the past, in which the voices of the entire Washington family joined in preconcerted "parts" or in one grand and rousing total.

To be sure the colonel had his fiddle, and when he took it down there was a gala night at Piccadilly.

Cousin Page was never replaced by a tutor. She had risen so nobly to her task that Colonel Washington had not the heart to bring another in, nor, as the years went on, the means at hand to do so. As for parting with Cousin Page, the idea was not entertained at all. When the servant left, not an infrequent incident, Cousin Page assisted Mrs. Washington in the kitchen. In the absence of the colonel, or the boys, Cousin Page could catch and harness any horse about the place. Cousin Page milked the cows and made the butter. She taught a class in the Sunday-school at Weyanoke and played the organ in the old church, and led the singing till the rafters rang. Like a true Virginian, she loved the negroes, however "trifling," if they "kept their place," and ruled and managed them amazingly.

The war had ended Cousin Page's one romance. Her lover had fallen at the battle of The Seven Pines. The blow had stunned, the wound healed slowly. But the work and care and busy useful life among her own "kin" at Piccadilly soon turned her thoughts to present needs, and as time passed she found her heart as warm and full of hope as it had ever been. It was a large heart, and Cousin Page kept every corner of it filled to overflowing.

For three years past Cousin Page had found time, without neglecting her duties at Piccadilly, to teach the white children of the neighborhood in the little schoolhouse which stood in a ragged clearing on the roadside about half a mile from Comorn Hall.

After the arrival of the Beverleys they sat down twelve at table every day when the family was alone. The fare became

plainer, but no less abundant, and the colonel beamed upon them all with an even and equal effulgence. His theme was, more often than before, the millions to be made out of a rational organization of the oyster industry. He quite convinced himself that opulence would soon come knocking at his door. He proposed to interest northern capital in his scheme through the new owner of Comorn, when that mysterious person should appear upon the scene. He awaited with eagerness the arrival of Mrs. Brent, feeling sure she would give the neighborhood some clue to her husband's plans and purposes.

Now that Mrs. Brent's coming was a matter of but a day or two, the entire community gave itself up to a state of excited anticipation which permitted Miss Bessie's marriage to pass almost unnoticed save by the *Rappahannock Oyster Shell*, which announced in large head-lines "The Nuptials of Miss Elizabeth Blackburn, Only Child of Major John Carter Blackburn of Lucky Hit, to Colonel Joseph Macie of Burnt Quarter."

Indeed, in these days the carpetbagger, as the legal representative of Doctor J. C. Brent, achieved a local importance he had never enjoyed before. A few reputable people, supposed to be in full possession of their faculties, even went so far as to say there might be some good in the old rascal after all, but the more cautious and conservative members of the community shook their heads at this.

CHAPTER VII

MRS. BRENT ARRIVES

One morning early in the month of June a handsome, matronly looking woman, whose age might have been between forty and forty-five, stood on the deck of the *Powhatan* watching the dim line of the Virginia shore as the steamer, released from her moorings at the Maryland wharf, where she had been discharging and receiving freight and passengers, swung her prow slowly into the channel and headed for the blue rim of land which bounded the horizon to the south and west.

The voyager was dressed in mourning, but, though her smooth and placid face revealed a trace of anxiety, there was no sorrow marked upon it. Whatever the loss might have been which had caused her to habit herself in black it had not, manifestly, made any deep impression on her feelings.

Her rich dress and the erect and confident carriage of her handsome person betokened a sense of authority and consequence.

The expression of anxiety and keen interest deepened in her pale blue eyes as the boat cut its way swiftly through the sparkling surface of the mighty river. She drew a quick breath and the hold of her full white hands, which rested, ungloved, upon the rail, tightened involuntarily, as the fresh warm wind, spiced with the savor of the sea, stirred the smooth brown hair upon her temples.

The purser coming out on deck touched his cap and paused beside her.

"I believe you go ashore at Weyanoke Landing, ma'am," he said. "It's the next stop we make on the Virginia side."

"Yes, I leave the boat there. I have four trunks on board. I hope they'll not forget to put them off." And then, smiling

a little at her own anxiety, she added apologetically: "It's so long since I have traveled without my husband that I worry about every little thing."

"You needn't worry about your trunks, ma'am," the purser assured her. "I'll look out for them."

"Thank you," she said. Then as he still lingered, she asked: "Can you tell me how wide the river is? It seems almost like the ocean."

"I reckon it's a good six miles across from shore to shore. That's the mouth of the river off there to the left, and that's Chesapeake Bay beyond it. I don't reckon you can make out the headlands, but we river men know just where to look for them."

"No, I can't see them."

"Never been down the Potomac before, I reckon?" said the purser. "Making your first visit to old Virginia. It's a grand state, ma'am, grandest state in the Union, bar none."

"Yes, it is my first visit to the South."

There was polite dismissal in her tone. The purser, touching his cap again, was turning on his heel when her voice detained him.

"I beg your pardon, but will it be possible to see Comorn Hall from the boat before we reach Weyanoke Wharf? Do you know the place?"

"Know Comorn Hall?" the purser cried. "Well, I reckon I certainly do. Every one on the river knows old Comorn. You can't just exactly see the house from the river or the cove because there're trees about it. But you can see the roof and the dormer windows and the chimney stacks rising among the trees, before we get in too close. You'll see it there to the left, on the first ridge just above the lowlands where the wharf juts out, that's where it stands. It's a grand old place. The Beverleys owned it, built it and lived there time out of mind, grand people, but they've run down and had to sell. A gentleman named Brent has bought the place. Some say he's going to make a hotel out of it, and some say a health resort, and there was a report that it was to be turned

into a club for rich Yankees who'd come down for the duck shooting. I've heard Doctor Brent belongs to the old Brent family of Brentwood. That's Brentwood lying low there on the right-hand side of the cove across from Comorn Heights. They call it Brent's Cove till we come to the creek, then it's Brent's Creek up to the landing, and beyond the landing it's called Brent's Branch. You can't get away from Brents and Beverleys down here, ma'am. Yes, Weyanoke Cross Roads lies just a little ways back from the landing."

The purser paused and regarded the calm countenance beneath the black bonnet with frank perplexity.

"Maybe, ma'am, you know more about the sale of Comorn Hall than I do?"

"Perhaps I do," she answered, for the first time smiling slightly in recognition of her momentary triumph, "but it's not unnatural I should, as it is my husband who has bought the place. I've come down to put the house in order before Doctor Brent arrives from Europe. I think it is quite safe to say that my husband will not make a health resort nor a hotel of the property. He has bought Comorn Hall for a home."

"My! my!" cried the purser, this time removing his cap altogether and holding it in his hand, while the morning sun blazed clear and warm upon his curly head, "then you must be Mrs. Brent."

Mrs. Brent inclining her head in acquiescence, the identification was complete. The wonder of the encounter grew upon the purser.

"I reckon the whole population of Beverley's Neck would be out in force to see the *Powhatan* tie up at the wharf if they knew that the new lady of Comorn was on board. The sale's been the talk all up and down the river for a month. Why, for a while you couldn't hear anything else. Captain!" he called up to a man in shirt-sleeves who was smoking in the pilot house, "oh, Captain! Come on down. This lady is Mrs. Brent, wife of the gentleman who's bought old Comorn Hall." Then in an aside to the lady thus signaled out for

the attention of the captain and the gaze of those on deck: "He'll be down hot foot now."

And, as if to make good the purser's words, the coatless captain's voice was heard from above:

"Is that so! My! My! Tell the lady I'll be down right off."

The purser apologized to Mrs. Brent.

"It'd 'a' been all my job was worth not to tell him, ma'am. I knew he'd want to know. You ought to 'a' let us know who you was, ma'am, and we'd 'a' seen that everything was done to suit you. I'd 'a' put you at the captain's table."

Before Mrs. Brent could reply the captain, who had hurriedly resumed his coat, came down the steps from the pilot house, cap in hand, to offer his homage to the new mistress of Comorn Hall.

"You've certainly got the grandest property on the river, ma'am," he said, shaking Mrs. Brent warmly by the hand. "The society can't be beat in Virginia. Judge Mason Blackford says it's the finest in the world, and I don't reckon there's many would dispute it with him. The judge is a man that can't bear opposition when he knows he's right. It was too bad Mrs. Beverley couldn't keep the place, but since she had to sell we're glad that a gentleman of wealth has bought it, who will know how to value it for its history and associations. You and your husband are certain to find congenial society in Northmoreland County. I suppose you'll have friends to meet you at the wharf, ma'am?"

"A Mr. James Washington," Mrs. Brent answered stiffly, as though she considered that the great name was belittled by such associations, "a Mr. James Washington who arranged the sale of the property to my husband, an agent, I presume, is to meet me at Weyanoke Landing."

For a moment the face of the captain of the *Powhatan* wore an odd blank expression. It cleared away.

"Oh," he cried cheerfully, "oh, I know who you mean. You mean Colonel Jim Washington of Piccadilly. Of course! The colonel's a great man down here in old Northmoreland. Isn't a man who's better known all over the Northern Neck

than Colonel Washington. He was Colonel Beverley's executor. Colonel Beverley and Colonel Washington married sisters. I couldn't think for a minute who on earth it could be when you spoke of Mr. Washington and said he was an agent. They don't run much to business in that family, never did, unless it was to public business."

These northern people sometimes needed a little gentle putting in place, the captain thought.

"There," the purser exclaimed, pointing to an indistinct suggestion of chimney stacks rising among lofty trees upon a distant height on the Virginia shore. "There! You can't exactly see the house, but maybe you can make out the dormer windows and the big chimneys. See, there by that tall tree-top. That's a Lombardy poplar that stands in the garden. There, you can see it now! That gray patch in the trees is the roof of Comorn Hall."

Mrs. Brent searched the line of the nearing shore. There indeed in the midst of what seemed at first an unbroken stretch of woodland she distinguished something different; the spire-like tree-top, she could be sure of that; and she thought she saw the chimneys rising against the sky-line. A certain pride mingled with the look of anxiety which had clouded her eyes. She detected in the deference of the captain and the purser something of what it might mean to be mistress of the old manor house.

Soon the tall chimneys and the steep gray roof were lost to view as the steamer took its course up the wide cove to the narrower waters of Brent's Creek and so on a little way to Weyanoke Landing.

As the boat drew in Mrs. Brent watched the little crowd gathered upon the wharf. Barrels of fish were ranged before the weather-beaten wharf-house; there were early vegetables in crates, a trunk or two, and the miscellaneous assortment which constituted the day's exports, all labeled and arranged for shipment.

She heard the scream of the whistle high above.

She saw the lines flung out by dexterous hands, she saw the

scramble of the negroes on the wharf to catch them, saw the heavy hawsers made fast over the bulkheads and drawn taut, heard the clatter as the gangplank was run out, and suddenly she realized that her long journey was ended, and that its ending had brought her to the beginning of a new experience.

As the *Powhatan* settled securely alongside the wharf the captain assisted Mrs. Brent across the gangplank, and presented, with no little flourish, a group of gentlemen who had advanced to meet her.

"Mrs. Brent, ma'am, these gentlemen are your neighbors. Gentlemen, this is Mrs. Brent of Comorn Hall. Colonel Washington, of Piccadilly, ma'am, Major Blackburn, ma'am. This gentleman, ma'am, is Mr. Braxton, rector of old Wey-anoke Church. I see the colonel has his carriage. Colonel, who's going to take Mrs. Brent's trunks? I've got four of them here, sir. Step lively now, you black rascals," he called to the roustabouts, "and don't you throw those trunks around as if they were sacks of fertilizer. A little less chin music there." Then turning, all deferential consideration, to Mrs. Brent, he added: "The niggers certainly do get more trifling every day. But I reckon you'll get to know them soon enough without my telling you."

He shook hands cordially, offered his services elaborately, and recrossed the gangplank like an emperor. The roustabouts rushed their trucks on and off, jostling past one another in their haste to get the crates and barrels aboard. The whistle sounded again, a plume of steam ascended and drifted away in the sunlight against the brilliant blue of the sky, the great hawsers were cast off from the bulkheads and the *Powhatan* swung free and headed for the open waters of the Chesapeake on her way from wharf to wharf to Baltimore, which she would reach the following morning.

As the steamer receded rapidly Colonel Washington, who had been engaged in directing half a dozen negro loiterers to carry the trunks to a dilapidated old wagon, turned to Mrs. Brent and, taking her valise, led the way to the Piccadilly

carriage. Mr. Braxton handed Mrs. Brent in while Major Blackburn stood, hat in hand, beside the wheel.

"Colonel Macie would have been here to meet and welcome you, madam," said the major, "but he and my daughter are off on their honeymoon and won't be back at Burnt Quarter for a week. I came over in his place to offer my services. We certainly are glad to welcome you to Virginia, madam, and we will be glad to see your husband when he comes."

Mrs. Brent thanked Major Blackburn without profusion, and seemed relieved when by means of his willow wand Colonel Washington conjured his steeds into motion.

"I am sure they will be desirable people," Mr. Braxton said as he stood with Major Blackburn watching the old carriage shuffling off along the road to Comorn, veiled in its accompanying cloud of dust. But there was an indescribable sense of disappointment in his voice.

"They paid a good price, everything considered," said Major Blackburn. "That's something any way."

"I'll take Mrs. Braxton to call as soon as I can get Jake Yutsy to shoe Traveler," Mr. Braxton added. "The old order is changing, I reckon, and I don't see but that we'll have to make the best of it. She seems a pleasant sort of woman but it's hard to think of her filling Mrs. Beverley's place at Comorn. I suppose we'll have to take her husband into the vestry instead of Watt. I've written to him about it. He ought to do something very liberal for the church."

Mr. Braxton felt depressed all day.

"I ought to tell you, ma'am," the colonel began, as he settled comfortably back upon the little remaining upholstery of his carriage after assuring himself that Mrs. Brent was duly protected from the dust, "I ought to tell you, ma'am, that I didn't bring your own carriage to meet you, or your own wagon for your trunks, because Watt Beverley wanted them both put in good order before your husband should arrive, so I came over in my own carriage. Grand morning, ma'am, going to be a grand day."

For the time the colonel was at peace with all mankind.

He anticipated if not a pleasant drive at least an instructive one regarding the antecedents and the present plans and purposes of the new owners of Comorn. He gave Mrs. Brent what he considered sufficient time to take in the natural beauties of the scene; and then, her silence continuing unduly, he himself opened the campaign.

"I drove over to Comorn yesterday to see that everything was in order for your reception, ma'am. Mrs. Beverley has engaged a woman to cook for you, her own cook, Aunt Rachel, Uncle Robert's wife, and their daughter, Tillie, to wait on the table. You couldn't have a better man than Uncle Robert. He was born on the place, and he's never left it. They all live at the gate houses at Comorn Old Gate and they always go to their own home at night after their work is done. You'll have to arrange for Aunt Rachel or Tillie, or some of them to sleep at the Hall till Doctor Brent gets here. Watt Beverley is staying until you come. Had to have some one there or the nigger hands would have toted everything off the place. I reckon they haven't taken much. They're afraid of Watt."

This cheerful theme eliciting no response, the colonel fell back upon generalities.

"The niggers are our curse down here, ma'am. You people up north don't know anything about them, and in Canada, where you come from, I reckon you don't often see a black skin. You only got a few runaway slaves that slipped through before the war. But you'll see them here. They'll wear your life out with their shiftlessness the way they've worn out mine." And the genial colonel smiled happily upon her. "I had to give up farming on account of them," he added, and he seriously believed what he was saying. "I don't suppose you know yet just when we may expect Doctor Brent?"

"No," said Mrs. Brent, whose lips had been tightening perceptibly, "my husband's plans are not definitely settled. He had a great deal of business to attend to before he could leave Canada. He is in England now with his two eldest children. My little girl is at school in Canada and will not join

me until sometime later. I hope Doctor Brent may not be abroad long, but I scarcely expect him before August."

"Brent is an old name in this part of Tide-Water, ma'am, an honored name," the colonel suggested. "We've been hoping that your husband belonged to the Brents of Brentwood."

Mrs. Brent made no reply. She was looking across the ragged fields. Perhaps she did not hear him. As the colonel turned his horses into the familiar road which led away toward Comorn Hall and Piccadilly there was a noisy clatter of wheels behind him and a shabby buggy, drawn by a half-starved horse, dashed by, grazing his wheels and pouring a cloud of dust into the carriage.

In the buggy sat a burly negro of fifty, his heavy person clothed in greasy black. With him was a young mulatto whose flashy dress proclaimed his affiliation with the constantly increasing ranks of the "new" negroes.

The younger man was engaged in beating the old horse into a shambling gallop. As they went by the occupants of the carriage caught the words: "I won't take no white man's dust."

"Well, I'll be dogged!" ejaculated the colonel, forgetting for the moment Mrs. Brent's presence at his side, while his flushed face took on a purple hue. "I'll be dogged if it ain't old Mably, the nigger preacher, and Fred Catchiniel, the nigger school-teacher, with his Uncle Billy's horse. Forgive me, ma'am, for using such expressions, but those niggers took my breath away."

He tightened his hold upon his willow whip and lifted it as though to force his horses ahead and pass the buggy. Then seeing the road narrow between deeply worn gullies he checked his impulse and brought the horses to a walk.

"Niggers didn't used to try these tricks, ma'am," he said apologetically. "It's this talk of social equality that's been their ruin. They're like a different people. These men have a grudge against me but I didn't think they'd venture to show their ill will openly."

As he slowed his horses to a walk the negroes ahead brought their horse to a walk also. Occasional words drifted back.

"T'se a-gwine to have my natural rights, I is. Colored ladies and gentlemen got to stand on their rights these days, 'deed they has. I don't reckon I'll take old Jim Washington's dust when I'm a-carrying a colored gentleman like you, Brother Mably. I ain't going to hurry none, either. I won't sweat my horse for no white folks."

For two miles the negroes held the road, powdering the colonel and Mrs. Brent with the heavy dust, and always talking of "white folks" and "colored ladies and gentlemen."

Colonel Washington contained his wrath as best he could. Mrs. Brent sat pale and still beside him. She made no comment or remark, but no part of the negroes' insolence was lost upon her, and she was aware of the depths of Colonel Washington's indignation though he strove to conceal it as best he could.

A negro working in a field close by the roadside paused in his plowing to call out to the occupants of the buggy: "Morning, Brother Mably, morning, Brother Catchiniel; giving the white folks yo' dust, ain't you?"

When the colonel came up the man had turned his back and was following his mule off toward the woods.

"And that fellow lived on my place without paying rent for fifteen years," the colonel commented to Mrs. Brent.

After traversing a considerable distance at a snail's pace the buggy went on more briskly. It was not long before the colonel, who knew every inch of the road and whose lifelong acquaintance with the negro character gave him some insight into their motives, divined young Catchiniel's purpose. The school-teacher was making headway in an effort to gain ground that he might have time to water his panting horse at a ford where a small stream crossed the road, before Colonel Washington could come up and pass him on the bridge. By this maneuver he expected to hold his present advantage to the very gates of Comorn.

The wily colonel was careful to hold back his horses. But the moment he saw the buggy turning down to the stream he applied his conjuring rod with such good effect that the car-

riage swept onward and over the bridge before the negroes realized they were outwitted, and passing ahead by the length of his horses, took the lead, and his own pace, down the Neck.

"You hold the road hard the next time you get it, you Fred Catchiniel," he called back to the discomfited occupant of the buggy. "Now you colored gentlemen can take white folks' dust a while. Don't you ever crowd by me on the road again, either of you. And if I hear any more of your insolence I'll have a warrant out for you, mind you that."

He shook out the lines and left the negroes far behind. As he neared Comorn Old Gate he checked his horses that he might hail Hamp Sam, who stood at his cabin door, to know when that worthy was coming down to Piccadilly to help him get out a little cord-wood. The tall albino made an evasive reply. Lorella she'd been sick again, and his own garden needed 'tending. He declared he wasn't certain just when he could come. 'Deed he wasn't certain he could come at all.

The colonel shook his head.

"They're all too rich to work, ma'am, all too rich to work. Hamp Sam's one of your husband's tenants; so's old man Mably we passed, and so's Fred Catchiniel's Uncle Billy. They've all got a grudge against me as I told you. Since I've been executor of Colonel Beverley's estate I've made them pay their rent, or work it out. They pay only a dollar and a half a month for their cabins and an acre or so of land, and they have their firewood furnished them without any expense but the trouble of cutting and hauling it. I reckon my barn will go some night. No new thing down this way if it does."

Colonel Washington, pausing for breath, became aware that Mrs. Brent had laid her hand upon his arm.

"You said that man's name was—?"

"Hamp Sam. Hamp Sam Brent, I reckon it ought to be, but Hamp Sam's all he gets. Used to belong to the Brents of Brentwood before the war. A bad nigger, ma'am, but not so bad as he used to be."

"Hamp," Mrs. Brent repeated. "I suppose that stands for Hampton?"

"Yes, that's what it stands for. He took his old master's name. I reckon they call him Mr. Hampton Brent at old man Mably's church yonder. But he'll hang as Hamp Sam yet if I'm not much mistaken."

"You don't believe in the progress of the negro race?"

"I'll believe in it when I see it," said the colonel. "But I haven't seen much of it to-day."

He paused for a moment and then continued. "In old slavery days before the war they got along pretty well. They reached their high tide in those days to my thinking. It was slavery that brought out all the good there was in them.

"When I was a boy a nigger never thought of some things. They said up north that we kept them down. Maybe we did; but we kept them busy and we kept them out of mischief. Now they're thinking beyond the old barriers and they're beginning to cross them, too. Up north they say now that the white man hates the nigger. Just let 'em come down here and see if that's the case. It's the nigger who hates the white man every time, and if we're not let alone to manage them in our own way there's going to be a heap of trouble. I used to think it might hold off for a good many years yet. I didn't think it would come in my time. But the clouds are rolling in, and when the clouds get thick enough there's got to be a storm somewhere. It's my conviction the negro race will never rest until it tries its strength against the whites."

Mrs. Brent making no reply, the colonel did not speak again until they came in sight of Comorn Hall.

"There's your new home, madam," he said as they approached the old manor house. "That's Comorn Hall. I certainly hope you may be happy in it."

As they drew up at the door Watt Beverley came out to meet them, hat in hand, looking very pale but very handsome with his set lips and formal manner, from which he could not banish a suggestion of hauteur and injury. His family had been driven into exile; he could not forget that his mother had made way for this determined looking woman. As he

saw Mrs. Brent he realized how completely the old ties were broken, how utterly their home was lost to them.

He gave the keys to Mrs. Brent, told her the names of the servants, Uncle Robert, Aunt Rachel and Tillie, who stood near to receive her orders, asked if there was anything he could do, shook her hand formally, directed Uncle Robert to put his bags in Colonel Washington's carriage, and then following them quickly drove off with his uncle without once looking back.

Mrs. Brent paused a moment irresolutely, and then, as if gathering her courage, went slowly up the long flight of stone steps and entered the house. At her order Aunt Rachel closed the heavy door behind her, shutting out the warm June air. With the very entrance of her black-clothed figure a different sentiment seemed to invest the place. Its great past, which in the time of the Beverleys was but a mellow yesterday, still near and intimate and unforbidden, seemed now to number every year and month and day that separated its golden epoch from the rule of this new mistress. Ownership and possession were hers, but the soul and spirit of the place had been no party to the deed of sale and gave her no allegiance.

Uncle Robert looked wistfully after the departing carriage, shook his head sadly and muttering to himself made off toward the stables.

"Well, Watt," said the colonel, breaking the long silence, but not looking at young Beverley's set face or seeking to meet the fine gray eyes into which the bitter tears would force themselves. "Well, Watt, this Mrs. J. C. Brent isn't exactly what I'd call a very communicative woman; I've been trying to recollect what I'd have to tell your Aunt Maria and Cousin Page. There are two children in England, and one in Canada, and I'm blessed if that isn't everything she told me. I reckon they'll have to go hungry this evening for particulars respecting the Brent family. I don't reckon that lady's anxious to be very neighborly."

"She isn't a lady," said Watt, with a trace of huskiness in

his voice. "She's a highly respectable woman, I reckon, and her husband's rich. But that doesn't make her a lady. There's something common about her."

"Yes. I reckon I noticed it too, at least I felt it. Still, your Aunt Maria and Cousin Page had better go over and see her to-morrow. She's a woman, alone in a strange place, and maybe I talked too much about the niggers to please her." He sighed. "It's a long way sometimes from what was to what is, dogged if it ain't. It's hard to leave the old house to strangers, ain't it, Watty?"

The young man did not trust himself to speak.

CHAPTER VIII

BRENTWOOD AND ITS MISTRESS

Colonel Washington had hoped that his nephew's mood would improve as the distance lengthened between Comorn Hall and the old carriage scuttling in rickety state along the lowland roads which led away through great neglected open spaces and long stretches of woodland toward Piccadilly. But Watt's brow only grew darker and the silence more oppressive. It was with a sigh of relief that his uncle saw the gaunt chimneys and gray sides of Piccadilly at last come into view, with the wide waters of the river gleaming beyond the straggling locust groves.

Colonel Washington believed in the elimination of everything which could at any season of the year obstruct a clear view of the river. To exemplify his theory he had lopped off all the lower branches of the trees in his immediate vicinity. His idea was not esthetic, but it was hospitable. As he said himself, when his friends and neighbors came to Piccadilly, he didn't want them driving around over flower beds and bushes trying to hunt a place to hitch. It was indeed the colonel's boast that there wasn't a tree near his house that you couldn't get to with a wagon. It was one of the advantages he claimed for Piccadilly.

Under the shade of a tree quite near the house, Watt saw the Avalon carriage. Rance Williams was lolling lazily on the seat flicking idly at the green leaves above him with his whip. With quick irritation Watt remembered that he had always sat erect enough when waiting at the door of Comorn Hall. Rance did not change his attitude as the colonel drove up; it pleased him to be oblivious to the arrival of the Piccadilly carriage. He never even turned his head when a handsome strapping

young fellow in shabby clothes appeared from behind the house to lead the team away.

"Here, get in, Bush," Watt called to his cousin. "Get in, and I'll drive out for you."

Before the colonel could protest Watt, swinging the horses sharply, had collided violently with the carriage from Avalon.

"Lord, Mr. Watt, didn't you see I was here?" Rance cried, starting from his reverie. "You've locked the wheels. Can't you pull back a little?"

"You'll have to do the backing, Rance," said Watt. "And after this just keep your eyes about you when you're waiting at a gentleman's house. If you do you won't get into trouble."

The negro opened his lips to answer but a glance at Watt's frowning face warned him that safety lay in silence. He contented himself, therefore, with employing all his skill in extricating the Avalon carriage from the wheels of Colonel Washington's war chariot.

"Why did you run into him, Watt?" Bush asked when they had reached the stable and had begun unhitching.

"Wanted to teach him a lesson, the impudent nigger," growled his cousin.

It was in no amiable mood that Watt met Polly in the parlor of Piccadilly.

Mrs. Beckford had driven from Avalon to see just how crowded and uncomfortable the Beverleys were in their new quarters and to receive the first authentic gossip of Mrs. Brent's arrival.

"Here's Watt now," she said as he entered the room. "I couldn't go until we'd heard what Mrs. Brent thinks of Comorn. And tell me, have either of you learned if her husband is really any kin to the Brents of Brentwood? I do hope they're going to be a real addition to society in Northmoreland County. Tell us all about her, Watt, that's a good boy."

"You'll have to ask Uncle Jim," Watt answered stiffly. "I don't know what Mrs. Brent thinks of Comorn. She didn't interest me in the least."

Watt had always considered Mrs. Beckford a silly woman; to-day as he listened to her talk he passed a harsher judgment upon her. It was a relief to every one when Ada asked Polly to go with her to see how she had fitted up the club house for Watt and Bush. Watt followed them from the room.

The club house was a frame bungalow erected a few years before by a Baltimore gun club on land leased from Colonel Washington. In time the club had broken up and the land with the building reverted to the colonel.

It stood on the low bluff near the shore some four or five hundred yards from Piccadilly. Owing, however, to a dense growth of young timber, only the roof was visible from the upper windows of Piccadilly.

Here Ada had placed the portraits and the few pieces of furniture brought from Comorn, transforming the one big living-room into a charming interior. In Watt's bedroom, which opened from the living-room, all his familiar personal belongings had been placed.

In a better mood Watt would have been delighted to find such comfortable and homelike quarters at his disposal, but in this black hour Ada's surprise fell flat enough. After some unhappy moments Polly suggested that she must return to the house, her mother would be going soon.

"Then you mustn't wait for me," Ada said quickly, hoping that left to themselves Polly and her brother might reach a better understanding. "Watt will walk back with you, and I'll follow as soon as I've improved things here a little."

From the window Ada saw that Watt and Polly made their way to the beach beneath the bluff, where they paced the sands, evidently talking earnestly.

Ada's own mood was not the happiest. Mrs. Beckford had not scrupled to make some disquieting allusions to the changes likely to occur now that Miss Bessie had become Mrs. Macie, and would no longer be controlled by her father's opinion. It was very doubtful, Mrs. Beckford thought, that things would be permitted to go on as they were at Brentwood. Miss Bessie was quite certain to apply to the court to have a guardian

appointed for her cousin, indeed Mrs. Beckford wouldn't be at all surprised if Colonel Macie was appointed. Miss Bessie was very nervous about Brentwood, and uneasy about the pictures and bric-à-brac and the old furniture with which the house was crowded. Everybody knew the things were simply priceless. Some of the portraits alone must be worth thousands, and yet they were left absolutely at the mercy of that poor, deluded, crazy creature. Miss Bessie, as the next heir under the old doctor's will, certainly did have some rights, Mrs. Beckford said.

Lost in her own serious thoughts she was startled to see Watt pass the window. In a moment he entered the room and flung himself in a chair by the table. Taking up a book he opened it and turned the pages. Ada saw that it shook in his trembling hands.

"Where's Polly?" she asked quietly.

"Gone," her brother answered in a choking voice. "There!" He rose and going to the open window listened intently. "There goes the carriage now. It's all up. Everything's over between us. I've broken it all off. She doesn't think I mean it, but I do. She shan't waste her life waiting for me, and I won't live on her father's bounty."

"But, Watt, don't be unreasonable. Don't blame poor little Polly. She loves you, you know she does, and you love her," his sister urged.

"Yes, I love her. I know that well enough. I wouldn't be so damned unhappy if I didn't."

"Then you can't let things end this way. It isn't fair to yourself. It's cruel to Polly. Polly will wait. You will succeed. I know just how miserable you've made her. Perhaps you can overtake them. Just say 'It's all right, Polly.' She will understand. Go, Watt, go!"

"No. It's no use. It's over. It's ended. If I'm going to sink I'll go down by myself. And, by God, that fool of a mother of hers shan't come here patronizing us! I reckon I can stop that, anyway."

"Oh, Watt, think again," Ada entreated. "Don't be so

cruel to poor Polly. Don't punish her for our misfortunes or for her mother's foolish talk. It isn't fair, it isn't just."

The next issue of the *Rappahannock Oyster Shell* announced in glowing periods the advent of Mrs. Brent of Comorn Hall with all the editorial fulsomeness of which the Honorable Gus was capable with Doctor Brent's check in mind to lubricate his mental processes and to release the full effulgence of his style.

Mrs. Washington and Miss Dinwiddie had called upon Mrs. Brent the day after her arrival to offer their friendly services. Everything about the house spoke of change. In some subtle and indefinite way they were made aware that, as far as Mrs. Brent was concerned, the old order was ended and a new order begun. The Beverley customs, the Beverley methods, the Beverley traditions meant nothing to the new mistress of Comorn. The place was, as it were, suddenly stripped of its associations and of its halo of age, and was to be put sternly upon trial by this practical newcomer.

On the whole Mrs. Brent made a favorable impression and well within the usual time the people of consequence in the community called at Comorn.

Mrs. Brent never invited her visitors to come again, and while the punctuality with which she returned their visits was itself sufficient evidence that she meant to put no slight upon their friendly overtures, it was yet a check to intimacy.

Calling one day upon the new Mrs. Macie, now returned from her honeymoon and established at Burnt Quarter, Mrs. Brent heard a great deal of the occupants of Brentwood. Mrs. Macie had been eagerly seeking some pretext to visit her cousin, but being one of those who always wish the countenance of another in her enterprises, to whose shoulder, in emergency, any irksome responsibility might be shifted, she had delayed until an auspicious moment should present itself. This moment she felt had arrived with Mrs. Brent, and as Mrs. Brent rose she said:

"I'm going to ask you to do me the greatest favor. Colonel Macie drove over to the Cross Roads after luncheon to meet

Colonel Washington to arrange the transfer of that mortgage he holds on Piccadilly; it's to be put in Doctor Brent's name to-day. I suppose you know about it. Colonel Macie says it's just the same as if Doctor Brent had bought Piccadilly. But what I wanted to ask was this: will you let me drive as far as the Cross Roads with you, and then I can drive back with Colonel Macie? And would you mind very much if I stopped for just one minute at Brentwood to ask how Cousin Constance is? I might stop coming home but it may be late, and you know how men are when it's nearly supper-time."

"I'll drive you there, of course, Mrs. Macie," Mrs. Brent replied.

Brentwood was older even than Comorn Hall, and was as typical, in its different way, as the stately manor house of the Beverleys. Like Comorn its bricks were laid in Flemish Bond, the "headers" black and glazed, while the "stretchers" had been burnt a deep dark red. Time had mellowed the old walls until they took on tints of green and gray and blue which harmonized with the green and mossy setting of the house. Broad lawns, studded with giant oaks and tulip trees, sloped gently to the waters of Brent's Cove.

Brentwood was impressive. From a central block, two stories in height, but of a single room in depth, low wings extended, each the counterpart of the other, giving dignity and balance to the front, which was more than two hundred feet in length. To the right and to the left were groups of low brick buildings of great age. Those to the left contained the kitchens and the quarters for the house servants, those to the right had been used by Doctor Brent, Miss Constance's father, as his offices, and as bachelor quarters where young gentlemen were stowed away in the good old times when Brentwood had been a center of life and hospitality.

Now the decaying servants' quarters were occupied only by Uncle Isaac and his wife, Aunt Jane, who after the war had made a short migration into another county to convince themselves that they were free and then returned repentantly to Brentwood and asked their old master to take them home

again. Here they had ever since remained, Aunt Jane as cook, laundress and housekeeper, Uncle Isaac as groom, wood-chopper and farm-hand. They had been Doctor Brent's mainstay in his declining years, and their devotion had made it possible for Miss Constance to live on at Brentwood despite her shadowed mind until her son had grown to an age when he could manage the plantation.

As the carriage stopped before the door of Brentwood, Uncle Isaac came shuffling forward.

"'Deed if it ain't Miss Bessie," said the old negro with a fair assumption of hospitable satisfaction. "It's certainly been some time since we's seen Miss Bessie here. No, Mr. John he ain't at home. 'Deed, Miss Bessie, ma'am, I can't tell just exactly when Mr. John will be back. He's off along the shore somewheres seeing after the loading of a load of cord-wood on a bug-eye boat that put in this morning. Mr. John he's a-shipping his wood to the wood-yards in Washington. Oh, yes, Miss Constance she's at home."

As Uncle Isaac spoke the door was opened by Aunt Jane. Mrs. Macie turned to Mrs. Brent.

"Come in, just for a moment, do," she urged.

But Mrs. Brent demurred.

"Let me wait for you here," she said. "I really would rather not go in. It can't be agreeable to your cousin to meet strangers."

But Mrs. Macie insisted.

"Oh, do come, just for a moment, just to see the inside of the house and the old portraits. We won't stay. I won't go in unless you do."

Mrs. Brent, controlling a strong sense of resentment, yielded and following Mrs. Macie entered the house.

The hall at Brentwood was large and square and paneled to the ceiling. Upon the walls hung many portraits.

"That's old Sir William Brent, the governor," Miss Bessie said, directing Mrs. Brent's attention to the portrait of a handsome florid gentleman of the time of George the First which hung above the fireplace. "Painted by Sir Godfrey

Kneller," she added in a whisper as Aunt Jane opened a door on the left which admitted them to the drawing-room.

Here they found Mrs. Macie's cousin seated before an old harpsichord near one of the windows which looked out upon the garden. Miss Constance was small and delicate, with thick masses of snow-white hair which fell in profusion upon her shoulders. She was dressed in a long trailing gown of white, fashioned by her own hands from some heirloom which she had found in one of the old trunks in the attic. She would be clothed only in white. About her shoulders she had drawn a white shawl, fringed, and embroidered in colored flowers which she had worked herself. Her features were those of a woman who had once been very beautiful. Her eyes were clear but vacant and elusive. Her intelligence appeared not to be extinguished but to flicker fitfully.

It was only upon her son, and her old servants, and upon a few homely and intimate objects of her daily contact that she could without pathetic effort concentrate her attention for any length of time. Miss Constance's malady had always been confined to the gentler forms of madness, to hallucinations and to harmless vagaries. Often for months together she appeared quite rational, and even in her more troubled moods the presence of her son would always soothe and calm her.

Aunt Jane crossed the room softly and laid her black hand gently upon Miss Constance's shoulder.

"Miss Constance, honey, here is yo' cousin Miss Bessie, an' a lady come to see yo' an' to ask after yo' health, honey."

"I'm well, Jane. Thank them and tell them I'm always well." Then in an audible whisper she added, while she clung to the old negress as a child might have clung to its nurse: "Where is my father? Find father and make him send them away. I'm afraid of Cousin Bessie."

"Why, Constance Brent, how can you say such a thing?" Miss Bessie cried as she advanced. "What will this lady think if she hears you talk this way? You don't know this lady,

do you? Well, she is the lady who has come to live at Comorn Hall. You've heard of her from Aunt Jane, I suppose."

"Oh, yes, I've heard of her. I've heard them all speaking of her, and wondering when her husband will come, and wondering who she is." She shook her head. "It seems to me I should know who he is, but I can't remember." She paused and then looked up at Mrs. Brent. "Have you seen the ghosts about the Hall? I see ours here every day, the white ghosts in the night, and the black ghosts in the day. The black ghosts hide away at evening, and then the white ghosts come out and search for them. And all day long the black ghosts search for the white ghosts. But I hide them away and they can't find them. They would kill them if they could. I put them in the trunks up-stairs in the attic with my dolls, and it's quite useless for the black ghosts to search for them. Sometimes the Comorn ghosts come across the cove at night to visit the ghosts at Brentwood, so many of them are related. Old General Beverley comes sometimes to talk to grandpa in the burying-ground. He has been very restless ever since strangers came to Comorn, and father is restless, too, and won't stay in his grave. He comes into the house and sits here every evening watching us, and often he walks about the house all the night long calling to John or me. Once he called to Mammy Hetty, so he knows that she's come back. Where is John now? John is my other father," she explained to Mrs. Brent. "He is very young and I used to think he was my son, but now I know he is my other father."

Miss Bessie set her thin lips and shook her head decidedly.

"I never saw her worse," she said to the old negress. "It's a sin and a shame that she is left at large this way. It's a mercy she hasn't burnt the house down over her head and everything in it."

As she spoke her eyes wandered enviously about the room, noting the antique furniture, the rare bric-à-brac and the portraits, which here as in the hall, covered the paneled walls. The whole house was a veritable museum crowded with old

china, old silver, and heirlooms of every sort which had been accumulating under its roof for almost two centuries.

Certain of the portraits, Miss Bessie whispered to Mrs. Brent, were worth the price of Brentwood and its acres three times over. There were, beside the Kneller in the hall, a well authenticated Gainsborough and several Gilbert Stuarts, priceless canvases, all at the mercy of this mad woman. Suppose she should cut and slash them in a frenzy.

As they drove away they heard again the faint tinkling of the harpsichord. Near the gate they caught a glimpse of John Brent in boots and rough corduroys, an ax across his shoulder. Before Miss Bessie could call to him he had left the road and vanished in the thick woods.

"There, that was John Brent, as they call him. He saw us, I know perfectly well that he did. But he was just determined he would not speak to me. I suppose he's furious because we stopped at Brentwood. But you wanted to see the old place, didn't you?"

Unable to resist the temptation to explain John Brent, Miss Bessie told the story of Miss Constance and Doctor Brent's yellow boy, Julius Cæsar. She ardently desired to make Mrs. Brent her ally in the struggle which she intended to wage for the possession of Brentwood.

"Why, how pale you do look," Miss Bessie said, regarding her companion with surprise as she finished her recital. "Cousin Constance must have frightened you with all that silly talk of ghosts, I reckon. Don't you believe a single word she said about Comorn being haunted; it's nothing in the world but darky superstition."

Mrs. Brent did not recover her spirits for the rest of the drive. She left Mrs. Macie at the door of the post-office at Weyanoke Cross Roads, where they found Colonel Washington and Colonel Macie, who had just concluded their business.

As Mrs. Macie had said, the Piccadilly mortgage had been transferred to Doctor J. C. Brent. The new owner of Comorn, having settled his affairs, was now amply supplied with ready money.

As Colonel Macie gallantly assisted his bride to alight, Mamie Ann Dandridge, the colored postmistress of Weyanoke, came out of her neat little store and pushing rudely before Colonel Washington as he advanced to the carriage, handed Mrs. Brent two letters. Mrs. Brent thanked the woman, acknowledged Colonel Washington's belated salutation and continued on her way toward Comorn. One letter was from her daughter Celia, the other from her husband, who had reached New York. Doctor Brent expected to join his wife in Virginia in the course of a week or ten days.

Evening was settling over the land as Mrs. Brent approached Comorn. Hamp Sam had just quit work in the field. A tall old negress came to the door of his cabin as the carriage passed. Mrs. Brent glanced at the woman and drew her wrap about her more closely. The frogs were clamorous in the marshes but she did not hear them. Myriads of chimney swallows were wheeling high in the air but she did not see them. In the twilight Comorn Hall seemed dark and gloomy as the carriage paused before it. She shivered as she alighted and went up the steps.

CHAPTER IX

THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

Mrs. Washington was greatly relieved when she learned that the Piccadilly mortgage had been formally transferred to Doctor J. C. Brent and that the transfer was on record at the court-house.

"I can't tell you how thankful I am to have it all settled," she said when Colonel Washington returned from his interview with the carpetbagger. "I didn't like the idea of Colonel Macie having any claim upon our home. I couldn't help remembering how he had treated other people when he had them in his power. I don't feel so badly about Doctor Brent holding the mortgage, at least not while he owes sister those five thousand dollars. The one seems to offset the other. I didn't want to trouble you, but I've been almost worried sick since Colonel Macie's held that mortgage."

"Don't you worry, Maria," said her husband. "It's got two years to run, well not quite two years now, but almost; and I reckon I could get it renewed fast enough if I wanted to. No man on earth could ask for better security. Don't you worry about that."

Mrs. Beverley shared Mrs. Washington's relief.

"The very moment Doctor Brent pays the balance due on Comorn, that moment we shall ask him to release this mortgage," she assured her sister. "Then, if James insists, the children and I can hold the mortgage until it is convenient for him to pay it off. I wouldn't agree to that even, only James is so scrupulous, and I don't wish to offend him. I've spoken to Watt and the girls and they feel as I do. You know I never wanted James to raise the money in the first place."

"I know, Jinny, and I can't tell you what a comfort it is to know you will take up the mortgage if he finds any difficulty in meeting it. I'm so glad that Watt and the girls are willing, too."

"Watt and the girls are even more concerned about it than I am," said Mrs. Beverley.

A few days later the *Rappahannock Oyster Shell* had occasion to mention in its ill-printed columns that a vacancy of some standing in the vestry of Weyanoke Church had been filled by the election of Doctor J. C. Brent of Comorn Hall. The *Oyster Shell* congratulated every one concerned upon the wisdom and suitability of the choice.

Mr. Braxton and Colonel Washington wrote announcing his election to Doctor Brent and warmly welcomed him to his place on the vestry.

From time to time the *Oyster Shell* also had occasion to note the arrival at Weyanoke Landing of various shipments consigned to J. C. Brent, Comorn Hall, Northmoreland County, Virginia; among the most interesting being a grand piano and a splendid victoria, with a set of gold-mounted harness and a special livery for Uncle Robert.

Rowing up the cove to Weyanoke Landing one morning hoping to find a plow he had ordered from Baltimore, John Brent witnessed the unloading of Doctor Brent's household goods from the *Powhatan*. The whole wharf was crowded and littered with them, the last to be brought off being a collection of nondescript trunks, evidently accumulated by a traveled family in the course of two or three generations. An ambitious roustabout had piled several of these upon a small hand truck.

"Look out there, nigger," the purser cried as he crossed the gangplank, "don't tilt that truck! Damn your black skin, you'll dump those trunks overboard!"

But the warning came too late to save the trunks from being pitched violently upon the wharf. One, an old-fashioned leather-covered Saratoga, evidently a woman's trunk, of a

fashion in use twenty or thirty years before, was broken by its fall.

"Please, Mr. John, won't you lend a hand, sir?" Uncle Robert begged, as he struggled to secure it with a rope. "You knows how to tie a better knot than I do. 'Deed I don't want this rope slipping when we jolts down the Neck to Comorn. Seems like this old trunk got papers into it that might get scattered out."

As John drew the rope taut and secured it he read the name "C. Brent" printed in black letters on the end of the trunk.

Seeing the name and the initial which might so easily have stood for "Constance Brent," he was seized with a strong impulse to undo the knots he had tied and assure himself of what the trunk contained.

The impulse was absurd, he knew. How could a trunk which had once been his mother's come into the possession of Doctor J. C. Brent, of Montreal? It was out of the question, unless Doctor Brent should prove to be some distant cousin to whom his mother had gone when she left Brentwood.

A week later the *Rappahannock Oyster Shell* printed the following: "We learn from a reliable source, as we go to press, that a committee of our first citizens has been organized to meet Doctor J. C. Brent at Weyanoke Landing on Thursday morning, and that the committee, after appropriate salutations have been exchanged, will escort Doctor Brent to Comorn Hall."

On the morning announced, Colonel Washington, accompanied by the reluctant Watt, Colonel Macie, with his son Joe, a coarse-grained, good-looking, bullet-headed young man of an assertive temperament, there to back up his father and see that he was not shouldered to the rear by more important citizens; the Reverend Mr. Braxton, Major Blackburn and the vestry of Weyanoke Church, were on the wharf when the *Powhatan* could be descried, a gray speck under her cloud of smoke, as she lay at a wharf on the Maryland shore six miles away across the glittering stretch of water.

At the landward end of the wharf, drawn up a little way

above the beach, stood the new victoria; erect upon the box sat Uncle Robert, the Comorn coachman, resplendent in his livery; while the horses champed their new bits and jingled their new harness with a fine impatience.

As the local notabilities arrived, their first glance was invariably toward the victoria, expecting to see Mrs. Brent. But Mrs. Brent was not to be discerned.

"Mrs. Brent, she certainly was mighty sorry," Uncle Robert told those who questioned him. "She certainly was mighty sorry, but her head done hurt her so she reckoned she'd better stay at home. She certainly ain't been real well for three or four days running. 'Deed she ain't."

"I don't reckon Judge Beckford's going to get here after all," Colonel Washington said with disappointment. "Any of you gentlemen seen Judge Beckford this morning?"

"I left the judge and Captain Fauntleroy at the post-office," Major Blackburn answered. "I cleared out because I was afraid Mamie Ann Dandridge would try some of her impudence on me, and I don't want to be the one to start a fuss about the way things are going at the office. But Judge Beckford said he'd wait for his copy of the *Oyster Shell*, he didn't care what happened. He reckoned the Honorable Gus couldn't be restrained, short of process of law, from throwing just one more fit before the *Powhatan* gets in with our illustrious fellow citizen from Canada. He'll be along as soon as the carrier gets over from Broken Banks."

Doctor Carniel, arriving as Major Blackburn spoke, was pretty sure he'd seen the team from Avalon coming up the road as he turned down to the wharf. The Honorable Gus certainly had attained a most unwonted felicity of expression in voicing the sentiments of the community, and if Judge Beckford had a copy of to-day's issue, Doctor Carniel said he wanted the first chance to see it. Any gentleman was welcome to keep his eye on the *Powhatan*, now perceptibly enlarging as the distance lessened, but for his part he wanted to keep his eye on the Honorable Gus and the little side-show he was conducting in the columns of his paper.

As the doctor spoke, Judge Beckford's horses rattled down the road and drew up under the clay bank on the shore. It was observed that the judge descended from his buggy with unusual haste and that he left Captain Fauntleroy to tie his horses to the tree which common usage denominated "Judge Beckford's hitching-post" and hurried on to join his fellow committeemen upon the wharf. Something white fluttered in the judge's hand.

"Sure enough, he's got the *Oyster Shell*," said Colonel Washington. "Gus's latest must be pretty good or the judge'd tie his own horses. Captain Fauntleroy isn't wasting any time at that tree, either. Well, now, Judge," he called as Judge Beckford came within hailing distance, "what's Gus got to say this time?"

There was no answering smile upon the judge's lips as he approached.

"Gentlemen," he said, "come into the wharf-house and shut the door. I've something here to read to you."

The building into which the gentlemen followed Judge Beckford was roughly constructed of unplanned boards, and served as a shelter both for freight and passengers in wet or windy weather. There was one large door which ran on rollers and a single window.

Colonel Macie was apparently so intent upon the approaching steamer that he was unaware of the arrival of Judge Beckford with the copy of the *Oyster Shell*.

Joe Macie held the door half open, calling to his father to "come on in," and in the momentary delay thus occasioned Captain Fauntleroy, hurrying after Judge Beckford, entered the wharf-house just as Watt Beverley, at a nod from the judge, was rolling the door shut.

Colonel Macie had not seemed to hear his son's invitation. He stood with his back toward the wharf-house, still apparently absorbed in contemplation of the approaching steamer.

"Now, then, Judge," chorused the gentlemen of the committee, "let's have it. Unless you think we ought to picket the beach, or send to Richmond for a Gatling gun."

"Gentlemen," Judge Beckford began, looking over his glasses sternly at the little group about him, "gentlemen, this isn't child's play any longer. This is serious business."

"Good God! Judge, it's no trouble about niggers! Nothing's happened over by the Rappahannock?"

Instantly a murmur rose. Some one rolled the door half open as if to make a way through which they could pass to action, but Judge Beckford calmed them.

"No, nothing of that sort. Listen! I'll come to it in a minute. Shut that door again, will you, Watt? Thank you. There's a heap of nonsense and then we come to this."

Adjusting his glasses as he stood by the window, the judge read rapidly but clearly from the paper in his hand: "Doctor J. C. Brent is interesting to this community not alone because he is a man of wealth and a traveled scholar, but because he bears a name well known and honored in the annals of Northmoreland County."

"Well?" Colonel Washington asked. "What's the matter with that? That's what we do hope, isn't it?"

"That isn't all," the judge said, and read on.

"Whether or not Doctor Brent will prove to be a member of the distinguished family of Brentwood no one as yet can say. If he is, the secret has been closely guarded by his charming wife. But his letters to his legal representative, Colonel Joseph Macie, a gentleman long and favorably known in this community, and to Colonel James Washington, have displayed such an intimate knowledge of Comorn and its locality that many of our citizens hope to greet in the person of the new proprietor of Comorn Hall a Brent of Brentwood. If it should prove that Doctor Brent is really a member of this family, whose name is now, unhappily, without prospect of being perpetuated in this community, and which is at present clouded by circumstances which are too painful to be dwelt upon, our good people will be doubly rejoiced to welcome in him a worthy scion of the proud old stock."

As Judge Beckford reached the period the *Powhatan* whistled for Weyanoke Landing. At the same moment some

one on the outside of the building rolled the door open and Colonel Macie signed to the gentlemen of the committee to advance to their stations.

For a moment even the swift approach of the steamer and the rattle of her lines as they were flung out to be caught by the loiterers on the wharf were not sufficient to relieve the overwhelming sensation which the reading had produced.

There could be no mistaking the words nor what they were intended to convey.

Doctor Carniel was the first to speak. "I tell you, gentlemen, I wish to characterize this shameful outrage as the first open move in a plot to deprive John Brent of what belongs to him. That's not an editorial. It's an advertisement, a notice to dispossess John Brent, and every word and line of it's been paid for by that damned rascal there!"

As he spoke he pointed scornfully to Colonel Macie.

What might have happened, no one knew, for at that moment the gangplank was lowered and the gentlemen of the committee, remembering the duty which had brought them to the wharf, hurried out to meet the new master of Comorn Hall.

The crowd of idlers, chiefly composed of negroes and poor whites who had been attracted by the unusual occasion, respectfully made way for them. There was a pause, and then a handsome portly man of middle age, dressed in a well-fitting frock coat and wearing a glossy silk hat, advanced across the gangplank with extended hand.

"Colonel Washington?" he asked.

"Yes," the colonel answered, then stared in astonishment, his face slowly purpling as he spoke. "Yes, I'm Colonel Washington. We are here to meet Doctor Brent. Is he on board?"

The portly gentleman removed his hat from his fine leonine head and bowed with ceremony.

"It was most kind of you, gentlemen, to come to the wharf to meet me. I am Doctor Brent." He smiled and again held out his well-gloved hand.

The sunlight shone pitilessly clear upon him. His heavy mass of curling hair and swarthy skin proclaimed him a mulatto. A negro was the new master of Comorn Hall.

"Gentlemen, you can't all have forgotten Julius Cæsar who was born at Brentwood!"

"Hall! He's a nigger!"

Where the voice came from no one knew. The effect was instantaneous. The wharf was cleared of the reception committee, its members vanished as if by magic. Only Colonel Macie remained, and even he did not take the hand which Doctor Brent extended to him.

When they reached the shore and the victoria Uncle Robert was gone. His maroon coat, with its gold-plated buttons, lay on the box. His silk hat, with its cockade, was in the dust.

"Me drive a nigger!" Mr. Bird, who chanced to be loitering near, had heard the old man say as he divested himself of his livery. "Me drive a nigger to Comorn Hall! Old General Beverley would riz up out of his grave an' clef' my skull, an' if he didn't I certainly reckon Mr. Watt would shoot me in my tracks! A nigger! Great God A'mighty! I never reckoned I'd live to see this day!"

How Doctor Brent entered his carriage and how a driver was secured in the person of the poor white he never knew. It was Colonel Macie who conducted the necessary negotiations for him.

"Here you, Murphy Bird," called the colonel, "you live down the Neck on the Comorn property. I'll give you a dollar to drive Doctor Brent to Comorn Hall."

"Me? To be sure. I reckon I can accommodate you, Colonel. A poor ride's better'n a proud walk, an' Salvadorie he's been a-complaining of his feet. Wanted to see the quality land, that's what we come for. I reckon we got a stomach full this time. Get up, Salvadorie; you're so little you don't have to think of your social standin' an' your pap never had none to worry over."

Mr. Bird looked at Doctor Brent compassionately and con-

fided his next remark to Colonel Macie behind one hand, as he waved the dollar bill gracefully toward the occupant of the victoria with the other.

"Coffee-colored, ain't he? Horse-doctor or parson? Get to be doctors more'n one way these days. Kingdom Come," he murmured softly. "My, my! Gentle Jerusalem, now do deliver me!"

Having thus relieved his mind, Mr. Bird climbed slowly to the box, where Salvadorie had preceded him, and gathering up the lines, started the eager horses off along the road to Comorn Hall.

As the victoria disappeared from sight, the reception committee slowly emerged from various places of concealment, all save Judge Beckford, who had retreated to the *Powhatan* and was borne away clinging to the bar, alternately cursing and laughing, and was not seen at Weyanoke Landing again until a Baltimore boat returned him late the next day.

"Doctor J. C. Brent!"

"A nigger!"

"Sold again!" laughed Captain Fauntleroy.

"Why, gentlemen, it's Julius Cæsar, Hamp Sam's half-brother. It's old Doctor Brent's handsome yellow boy that he sold to General Beverley just before the war. It's runaway Julius Cæsar, that's who it is, and married to a white woman and on his way to Comorn Hall in his own carriage."

"And a vestryman of Weyanoke!"

"And I had his check for a hundred dollars cashed three weeks ago and spent the money! Old Doctor Brent's Julius Cæsar, sure enough."

Colonel Washington awoke from a nightmare and rose to the occasion.

"Come; we'd better all go up to the rectory. We'd better talk this over quietly. It seems to me, gentlemen, we've got to do something about this."

"By God, we have!" Watt Beverley cried savagely. "A nigger at Comorn; a nigger living in my father's house!"

"And the fellow has a mortgage on Piccadilly," groaned his uncle.

Doctor Carniel plucked Colonel Washington by the sleeve. The colonel dropped back a step or two.

"What do you think now of that editorial in the *Oyster Shell*? What about that now?"

"If that were true, then this nigger would be young John Brent's—"

"It's an awful calumny; an awful and outrageous lie. John Brent's blood is as pure as yours or mine, sir; I'll stake my life on that."

CHAPTER X

DOCTOR BRENT

Mrs. Brent had never shared her husband's enthusiasm for the purchase of Comorn Hall. She had been strongly opposed to leaving their comfortable home in Montreal, and it was with reluctance and regret that she set out for Virginia.

Mrs. Brent had always regarded her husband with sincere admiration, and had never for a moment regretted her marriage or considered that it held any possibilities of unhappiness or disaster, until her arrival in Virginia. From that moment she had not ceased to be apprehensive.

Born in England of a respectable family of the small shop-keeping class, she had come to Canada in her girlhood with her father, a non-conformist minister. After a life of wandering from one poorly paid charge to another, the Hortons finally settled in Montreal.

Conspicuous in the congregation committed to the Reverend Mr. Horton's care was a young physician of fine and striking presence; gifted not only with an unusual readiness of speech, but with great natural eloquence Doctor J. C. Brent's admixture of negro blood did not prevent him from being an important figure in the church.

The romance of the physician's career interested the staid English girl. Born a slave on an old plantation in Virginia, he had drifted to Canada soon after the war, ultimately attaching himself to the household of an old French physician.

Doctor Eugene Raymond Moreau, whose practise was almost wholly among the residents of the French quarter of Montreal, soon came to have a high regard for the boyish ex-slave and promoted him from the position of servant to that of pupil. Under Doctor Moreau's tutelage, Julius Cæsar, possessing singular aptitude and ability, made rapid progress in his

studies and in due time took his degree and was admitted to the practise of medicine.

As Doctor Moreau's favorite and assistant, Doctor Brent soon attained a very fair measure of success. His African blood seemed rather to aid than to retard him, as it was a time when sympathy for the negro and the negro cause was at its height.

Before his studies were completed the handsome and ambitious ex-slave married Hortense Moreau, his benefactor's only child. After Doctor Moreau's death he succeeded to his practise and, his wife inheriting her father's house together with his considerable savings, Doctor Brent found himself in very prosperous circumstances.

By his first marriage Doctor Brent had two children, a son, Eugene Raymond, and a daughter, Hortense. Shortly after Hortense's birth Mrs. Brent died, leaving all she possessed to be divided equally between her husband and their children, only stipulating in her will that her children should be educated in part at least in France.

It was about two years after the death of the first Mrs. Brent that the Reverend Mr. Horton took up his residence in Montreal and Doctor Brent was brought into intimate relations with the clergyman and his family. Doctor Brent's remarkable talent for public speaking soon made him useful and important to Mr. Horton, who came to depend upon him more and more in the work of the church and Sunday-school.

From their first meeting, Doctor Brent had been attracted to Molly Horton. His admiration soon became so evident that their marriage a year later surprised no one and was only looked upon as the happy culmination of a pretty romance.

As time went on, Mrs. Brent came to set a high value upon her husband, upon herself and upon her lot in life. Her only child, a daughter, Celia, was born some four years after her marriage. Soon after Celia's birth Eugene and Hortense were sent to relatives in France to begin their education in accordance with the terms of their mother's will.

For many years Mrs. Brent's life ran on smoothly and un-

eventfully. Then one day Doctor Brent, who had already accumulated a comfortable competence, learned that he had fallen heir to sixty thousand dollars. This inheritance came to him from an uncle, Amos Brent, who had been a slave in a branch of the Brent family residing in Washington long prior to the Civil War. Some years before the signing of the Proclamation of Emancipation, Judge Brent, always an indulgent master, had given Amos his freedom, while still retaining him in his service.

Acting upon the advice of his benefactor, Amos invested his modest savings in town lots, then to be purchased in the north-western portion of the city for almost the proverbial song. In his will, Judge Brent did not forget the faithful servant he had freed, and the generous bequest was also invested in town lots by the negro. In time the tide of wealth and fashion swept toward the quarter of the city where these lots were located, and their value increased a hundredfold. Not long before his death Amos Brent sold his lots. Having no children, he made his will in favor of his nephew, signing by a mark a document which conveyed his entire property to "the doctor," as he proudly called his heir.

It was Mrs. Brent's desire that her husband should invest this unexpected inheritance in the safest possible securities and remain in Montreal and continue the practise of his profession. But the advertisement offering Comorn Hall for sale chancing to fall under Brent's eye, a passion to return to Virginia seized upon him too strongly to be resisted.

It had long been his dream to go back to the land of his birth. His ambition at first soared no higher than the ownership of a cabin like the one at Brentwood in which he was born; then, as his ideas grew with his success, place after place in the old neighborhood he pictured as his own: Burnt Quarter, which he remembered as the home of the Carniels, then Brentwood, and finally in a proud day-dream, Comorn Hall itself.

Dwelling continually upon this dream, it became at last his fixed ambition to return as master to the house in which

he had been a slave. To be master of Comorn Hall, it seemed to him, would be honor and success and splendor of attainment beyond any dream of Aladdin. And when the possibility came within his grasp he would let nothing stay his purpose.

As his plans took shape, old memories of his boyhood roused within him. He longed to feel once more the heat of the southern summer. He longed for the sight of the great river, with its thousand aspects and its many sails, for the sound of the tide on the wide firm beach, for the roughening wind in the pines, for the sandy roads bordered by cedars, for the brown and orange of the broom-sedge clothing the winter fields, for the cawing crows and the wide-winged buzzards drifting high in the brilliant blue, for the voices of the frogs in the marshes, for the countless swallows darting and wheeling at twilight above the chimneys of Comorn. The old land called him irresistibly with all the voices of his memory.

It scarcely occurred to him to consider what the attitude of the community might be toward him. It was his wife who, alarmed by the frequent allusions to race hostility at the South with which the papers were filled, first called his attention to this aspect of the case.

But earnestly as she urged it upon his attention she could not bring him to see its gravity. There had been no race problem and no race antipathy in the Virginia of his recollection. If trouble had arisen since he left the South it could not be very serious. In any event he did not see how it could apply to a man of his standing. For more than twenty years he had lived exclusively with members of the white race. Often for weeks together he neither saw nor spoke to one of his own people. His point of view had come to be that of the white men among whom he lived.

He had no unpleasant recollections of Virginia. It was true that when a boy he once escaped from Comorn, and that he had been recaptured; but the intervention of the daughter of his old master saved him from punishment. He had never received a blow from a white man in his life. He had rarely heard even a harsh word addressed to himself.

With his great gift of eloquence he often held audiences at church gatherings spellbound as he recited the hardships which his people had endured in bondage. But he had drawn his facts from his reading, never from his own experiences.

For all his achievement and success in life he gave credit to himself alone. It never occurred to him that his environment had done anything for him; it never occurred to him that if the harness of civilization which he had worn so long were to be stripped from him that with it might go any part of the poise and character upon which he prided himself.

Before Mrs. Brent set out for Virginia it was decided that she should say nothing of her husband's race or color and he carefully refrained from making any allusion which might have aroused such a suspicion in his letters to Colonel Washington and Colonel Macle.

If Doctor Brent had stopped to analyze the motives which prompted him to send his white wife to take up her residence at Comorn Hall nearly three months in advance of his coming he would have been amazed to find a shadow of something very like fear.

He told himself, as he told Mrs. Brent, that the settlement of his business affairs made necessary the earlier delays. When these matters no longer served as an excuse, he discovered a necessity to visit his eldest children in England, where they had gone after their years of schooling in France. Even when he had landed in New York he delayed his journey southward. Yet he was most eager to set foot upon his new possessions.

He never asked himself why he deferred the moment which so excited his imagination. When he was informed of his election to the vestry of Weyanoke he enjoyed a moment of pride and elation which could not have been increased. But this moment of high satisfaction was followed by a feeling of depression very closely akin to alarm. His good sense told him he could not have been elected had it been known he was a man of color.

His wife's progress in the community was a source of deep satisfaction. The names she mentioned so indifferently in her

letters were full of meaning to him. They had been great in the ears of his childhood. That his wife was received as a friend and equal in the houses to which he had been sent on servile errands in his youth meant much to him. He was glad to have Mrs. Brent establish an intimacy with those who were so soon to be his neighbors.

Immediately upon her arrival in Virginia Mrs. Brent had written urging upon her husband the necessity she felt that he should be known in his true character before he appeared at Comorn. Brent was not unimpressed by his wife's earnestness, and he thought seriously of writing to Colonel Macie to lay his case before him but, shrinking from the unpleasant task, he put it off on one pretext and another.

Finding that her husband disregarded her entreaties and having been herself forbidden to reveal his origin, Mrs. Brent made every effort to prepare him for the hostility which she was certain he would encounter. She filled her letters with long reports of the evidences of race prejudice which her anxiety caused her to see on every hand.

But Doctor Brent persisted in adhering to his belief that he would be received in Virginia as he had been received in Canada.

"A man will be judged on his merits in Virginia just as he is judged in any other civilized country," he wrote to Mrs. Brent.

As the *Powhatan* approached the wharf his eyes had sought in vain for the familiar figure of his wife; her absence gave him a momentary sense of apprehension. From the deck he could see his new victoria drawn up on the shore. He observed with mingled pride and doubt how it stood like a peacock among a group of shabby barnyard fowls. A smile hovered about his lips; in time he expected to occupy as conspicuous a place in the community as his carriage now occupied among those of his neighbors.

They had stood still, he thought, these old-time friends of his, while he had been advancing all these years; the world had moved on and he had moved with it; if there was any distance

between them it was scarcely he who would have to lift his eyes.

But he said to himself magnanimously that they should not be made to feel this distance by any act of his. The victoria glittering in the morning sunlight made it so obvious there would be no virtue in emphasis.

He felt a certain relief when he saw only a handful of loiterers on the wharf. His quick eye detected no persons of quality among them.

It never occurred to him to look for familiar faces in the row of curious black visages turned toward the incoming steamer. His whole interest lay in the white people, in the class whose ranks he was entering, not among the negroes from whom, in his own mind, as in his previous experience, he had entirely disassociated himself.

But when the door of the wharf-house was rolled back and he saw the full strength of the reception committee, he summoned all his self-command to meet the ordeal, and though his heart beat fast, there was no outward sign that his composed and smiling front did not bespeak a tranquil mind.

Even after his many years of absence he recognized Colonel Washington and Doctor Carniel at the first glance, and Mr. Braxton and Judge Beckford before he had crossed the gang-plank.

From the moment he had disclosed his identity on the wharf until he reached the door of Comorn Hall, his mind was a seething thing which saw everything but took no note of anything; that could only revolve about the public humiliation he had sustained at the hands of the men he had returned to live among. The rebuff held a sting beyond any previous experience of his life. He was outside the harness now which had so long sustained him. Here the successful ex-slave had no stock in trade of romance to appeal for him. Here no aspect of novelty attached itself to him. He made no claim whatever upon the imaginations of these men. He had left their midst an obscure negro boy, he returned the marked man of the whole community, and in their eyes the color which

in his youth had merely denoted his condition now suddenly became his offense.

He tried to think of these men as poor and shabby, to recall whatever of discredit attached to them in his boyhood, to revive old scandals, old abuses, that had been whispered in the cabins in his youth. These came back vividly enough, but they did not comfort him. Their ill-kept horses and their unwashed carryalls, their patched and mended harnesses, each graceless sign of thriftlessness and poverty he called to witness against them but without avail.

He scarcely looked at the road or across the fields where the young pines and sassafras were pushing up through the sand and the tangle of dewberry vines. It was all familiar to him. Not one new house, scarcely a new cabin or a new fence in the whole length of the road from Weyanoke Landing to Comorn Old Gate. Here a patch of woodland had been cleared, here an old field was overgrown with pines or oaks, in their strange rotation, but for the most part the road and fields and forests were as he had known them when a boy. If there was any change, it was that the country seemed more thinly settled, the land poorer in quality, and such crops as he saw scantier than they had been in his youth. All seemed familiar, accustomed, natural, and the years of his absence, of his effort and his honorable achievement were obliterated, almost as if they had never been, and he was no longer Doctor J. C. Brent, the successful physician of a great city, he was old Doctor Brent's Julius Cæsar again, nothing more.

It was only the touch of the upholstered seat of his carriage that forced the incongruous present upon him. He remembered how he had been brought back to Comorn over this very road after his capture when he had tried to escape from slavery. The Big Gum Swamp where he had hidden for three days lay off there to the right. The feel of his accustomed dress became oppressive. When he had followed these paths his feet were bare. He tore off his gloves, letting them fall neglected upon the floor of the carriage.

A negro hoeing in a field brought a flood of recollections

upon him. A negro woman standing in a cabin door brought back the memory of his mother. He had not thought of her before in years. She must be dead, of course. And his old Uncle Isaac and Aunt Jane, who used to be at Brentwood, they must be dead, too, after all these years and years. And Hamp, his half-brother, white-faced Hamp with his freckled skin and pink eyes, Hamp must be dead and gone. He had never heard from them nor of them since he left Virginia.

Then he thought how much he had aged. He had done a great deal for a negro, for Doctor Brent's yellow boy Julius Cæsar. And then he remembered the white woman who was waiting for him at the old manor house. The white woman was his wife, the old manor house was his home. It seemed incredible.

Watching with apprehensive eagerness from the dormer window of an upper room at Comorn, Mrs. Brent saw the carriage the moment it cleared the woods. She saw the uncouth figure of Murphy Bird seated upon the box with Salvadorie at his side, and knew at once that something calamitous had happened.

For a moment her strength failed her utterly and panic seized her heart. Then, summoning her courage, she went hastily down the stairs and passing swiftly across the hall met her husband as he ascended the long flight of steps to the door. His face confirmed her apprehensions.

"Why, Doctor Brent, where's Robert? Why didn't Robert drive you out? Didn't he give you my message? I've been ill in bed, I've only now come down-stairs. Come in." She spoke rapidly to cover her anxiety.

For the first time she felt a sense of shrinking as her husband bent to kiss her. She knew that the poor white on the box, and Beecher Mably, who had come running forward to take the horses, and the servants who at the first sound of wheels had hurried to the windows, were staring in amazement. She led the way quickly within and closed the heavy door. Passing along the hall she caught a glimpse of Aunt Rachel with her daughters, Tillie and Mignonette, huddled wide-eyed

in a doorway. To escape them she ascended the broad stairs, her husband following, to the room above, which she had chosen for her own.

Closing the door, she turned to Brent, who stood in the center of the room and waited for her to come to him. As she approached her husband she realized for the first time much which before had appeared as the stamp of his individuality now allied itself relentlessly in type and character with the faces of the negroes about her and became at once the indelible sign of the race from which he sprang.

"Why, Molly, I expected to see you at the wharf," he said with what he meant to be a tone of mild reproof. "You don't look sick."

"I am sick, Julius," she answered. "I've been sick for days, sick with fear and dread of some insult or indignity to you. I know I should have gone to the landing. It's the first time I've failed in courage. But I couldn't. I was afraid to trust myself. I was afraid I'd say or do something which would work against you in the end. What happened at the wharf? Why didn't Robert drive you home?"

"Ah," she said when she had heard the whole humiliating story, and his feeling of resentment against her had somewhat abated, "you should have done as I wanted you to do in the beginning. If they had known everything from the first, and had become accustomed to the idea, it might all have been different now. Now they will feel that you have deceived them and they will resent it."

How Mrs. Brent ever descended the stairs and faced the servants and awed them into a semblance of their former deference, she did not know. She only knew that she dared not allow her husband to be seen until she had passed from room to room and, by the firmness of her bearing and the authority of her familiar presence, reestablished discipline within the walls of Comorn Hall. She even made an excuse to visit the stables. But Robert was not to be found in his accustomed haunts.

The new victoria stood where the poor white had unhitched

at the stable door. The gold-mounted harness was thrown in a careless heap upon the seat. Mrs. Brent, calling to Beecher Mably, the shuffling house-boy, told him to hang the harness in the harness-room and then directed him to roll the carriage under cover.

"If you see Robert, send him to me," she said with grim significance.

The boy grinned derisively.

"I don't reckon Mr. Jackson'll be around this-a-way again this evening," he answered, showing his white eyeballs and his white teeth. "I done reckon Mr. Jackson's quit working for you-all. He's been here and gone a'ready. He say he left his white knee-pants an' his boots in the harness-room. He say he done lef' his coat an' hat at the wharf. He say he don't never work for colored folks nohow. He say Mr. Watt Beverley—"

But Mrs. Brent had turned and was walking rapidly toward the house.

Aunt Rachel and her daughters were standing in the kitchen doorway.

"I always did suspicion her," Aunt Rachel was confiding to Tillie and Mignonette in a voice which scorned all whispered concealment and sought the distances as freely as though it bore good tidings. "'Deed I don't believe she's any more white than what I am. Your pa he say he can go straight from here to Captain Fauntleroy's an' I reckon they'd be glad enough to get us all there. This Brent woman she better watch out or she'll be doin' her own housework before the week's over."

"'Deed, mama, I wouldn't like nothing better than for papa to take us to King's Green now Rance Williams has gone to work at Avalon."

"I won't take no uppishness from her, an' that's the truth indeed," said Aunt Rachel. "What business she got trying to pass herself off as a lady? Why, I can recollect her husband when he was nothing but a little yellow boy playing round his mammy's cabin at the edge of the marsh back of Brentwood

house afore old Doctor Brent took an' sold him to General Beverley. What'll Old Hetty say to her Julius Cæsar now when he comes a-lordin' it at Comorn Hall. My land, that nigger'll hold her head so high she'll just naturally comb it in the clouds, 'deed she will!"

Her husband's mother! Mrs. Brent heard no more.

The curtains were drawn and the lamps lighted when Doctor Brent came down to dinner that evening. The dim old dining-room with its paneled walls, its massive chimney-piece and deep wide hearth upon which a low fire smoldered, the candle-light on spotless linen and the rich pageant of china and bright silver reassured him, and he took his place at the head of the table with some shadow of the pride he had promised himself when he should return to sit in the seat of the master in the house where he had been a slave.

Under the stern eye of the mistress the courses of the abundant dinner came and went in their orderly arrangement as though no domestic upheaval threatened to disturb the tranquillity of Comorn Hall. Tillie and her sister Mignonette were in subdued attendance and even Aunt Rachel found an excuse to bring a special dish for Doctor Brent's approval. Doctor Brent was not unconscious of the stolen glances which were directed to him.

The curiosity which so oppressed and humiliated the spirit of his wife served rather to ease the sense of humiliation beneath which he smarted. To these people at least he might be all that his white neighbors would refuse to acknowledge him. Gradually his handsome head rose as a sense of his possible importance to his race grew in him, his breast expanded, his countenance became more genial; if he had not returned to be the friend and equal of his white neighbors, yet he might be the champion of his own downtrodden brethren.

Cheered and comforted by these thoughts, Doctor Brent sat at large ease, one dark and shapely hand fingering his wine-glass as it rested on the snowy cloth, the other resting caressingly upon the head of one of the carved dolphins which formed the arms of General Beverley's old chair of state.

When Doctor Brent spoke, his words were less for his wife than for the ears of the servants as they moved noiselessly about the room.

"I suppose you've been up-stairs and down-stairs and think you know this old house pretty well, Molly," he said, while an indulgent smile gilded his bronzed features into pleasantness, "but to-morrow I'll take you round and show you things you've never dreamed of."

His eyes wandered observantly about the stately room, then back to Mrs. Brent, but not before his glance had comprehended Tillie and Mignonette.

"I've seen old General Beverley sitting in this very chair a hundred times, as I've come in there through that door bringing the dishes from the kitchen. Old Miss Ann, the general's wife, always sat where you are sitting now, in that same chair, I reckon. Yes, it was in that very chair, for there's a scar on the arm of the one I'm sitting in, so I know it's the general's. I always heard that Mr. Everard made it with his pocket knife when he was a little fellow. He wanted to cut the dolphin's tail off so he could salt it down in the herring-barrel, his father said. It was one of the family jokes. Yes, Miss Ann sat in that very chair, but wasn't a finer-looking lady than I've brought down from Canada to take her place. The young squire, Mr. Everard, sat here on his father's right after he'd learned to let the dolphins' tails alone, and I remember his sister, Miss Nannie, sat over there on her mother's right. She died young. But the cousins and kin and company kept coming and going all the year round. And now they're all gone, all dead and gone, or poor and scattered, and I'm sitting here in the old general's place, owning all he owned; and when I come to die I reckon I'll be laid out there alongside of where they've laid him in the old burying-ground."

As he spoke a loud hello came from the west front of the house.

Rising and pushing back his chair, Brent passed into the hall and, taking up a lamp which stood upon a table, opened

the outer door. In the flood of light Colonel Macie was seen leaning forward in his buggy.

"Good evening, Doctor," the carpetbagger called up to the massive figure in the doorway. "Got any one to take my buggy to the stable? I've come over to make a neighborly visit, and my horse don't stand very well. I don't suppose you were expecting much company to-night. Give 'em time, Doctor, give 'em time."

At Brent's summons Beecher Mably appeared and led the horse away through the darkness toward the stables. Doctor Brent retraced his steps to the dining-room, followed by Colonel Macie.

"You know Mrs. Brent," he said as he reseated himself in General Beverley's chair. "We were just finishing our dinner. Won't you sit down and join us? Mrs. Brent will have the things brought back."

Colonel Macie declined Doctor Brent's invitation civilly enough. He'd had an early dinner at Burnt Quarter. He was not prepared to sacrifice his standing as a white man in the community for a glass of wine. He drew his chair to the hearth and warmed his hands. Though it was midsummer, a cold wind had risen.

"Snug, isn't it?" he said, glancing about approvingly. Then, as the servants left the room, he lowered his voice while he let his furtive eyes rest smilingly upon Brent for a moment.

"I don't suppose you've any idea what a hornet's nest you've stirred up, Doctor. I've stirred 'em up sometimes myself, but I never got their blood to circulating quite so fast. You've taken their breath away. You took mine, too, I admit it; but after I got home and began to think of things I saw my duty was to put the horse in the shafts and come over and have a talk with you. I've been acting as your attorney and it seemed the right thing to do. I'm glad to say that Mrs. Macie saw it as I did." He paused and looked about the room again. "How are you going to line out your campaign, Doctor?"

When Doctor Brent replied, it was after a pause, and it was with dignity.

"I don't know that I'm going to do anything," he began, speaking deliberately. "I've no plans for a campaign; no, sir, none whatever. I don't see that I am called upon to do anything but conduct myself like any other resident of Virginia. I have come down here to the part of the world where I was born, to live my life out. I reckon I've a clear right to do what I've done under the Constitution. I've the same right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness that every man's supposed to enjoy in the United States. I expected a different welcome, I admit, but I hope they'll come round in time when they get to know me better."

He paused, expecting Colonel Macie to assent.

"They'll never change," the carpetbagger answered as he shook his head. "Never! Don't expect it. I don't suppose it's violating any confidence to tell you that I gathered at the wharf after you drove away, and at a little meeting at the rectory at the Cross Roads, that there'd be an effort made by the Beverleys and their friends to buy this property back, perhaps at a slight advance. They can't bear the idea of a"—Colonel Macie paused uneasily and felt about for his word—"a gentleman of color living in their old home. If they make such a proposition, will you deed Comorn back to them?"

Mrs. Brent turned to her husband. Here at last a way opened by which they might escape from the inevitable results of what she considered a tragic mistake.

"I should thank God, Julius, for the chance to shake the dust of this place from my feet forever!" she cried passionately, her face white and strained in the candle-light. "You will take them at their word, Julius, and we will go back to Montreal, anywhere in the North, anywhere in the world but here. You'll take this way out, Julius, say you will."

"No," said Brent, who had risen and now stood leaning forward with both hands resting upon the table. "No, I won't. I've come back here to stay. If they don't want me on this

neck of land they'll have to put me off. That's all I've got to say. Tell them that for me, if you please, Colonel Macie; Comorn Hall is not for sale at any price."

He pushed the glasses from about his plate as though he were thrusting back an invading army, and then strode across the thick carpet to the fireplace and stood there, the red glow upon his swarthy face, looking strong and masterful with his splendid head held high. Colonel Macie had been wondering all day who it was that Doctor Brent reminded him of; now he knew.

"Did anybody ever tell you that you looked like Fred Douglass?" he asked. "Only you look twenty years younger than Fred Douglass looked the last time I saw him."

"Hello! Hello! Hello!" rang a loud voice from the night without. "Hello in thar! Is Colonel Macie in thar? Hello thar! Hello!"

The colonel started up.

"Some one for me. What's wrong now, I wonder."

He hurried to the door, followed by Doctor Brent, who again possessed himself of the lamp and paused behind Colonel Macie at the top of the steps. Below them in a light buggy sat a large man wearing a broad-brimmed straw hat.

"Is that you, Mr. Fox? What's the matter?" the colonel asked.

"Matter enough, Colonel. Come along; get in here with me. We ain't got no time to stop. Young John Brent's shot Gus Wyatt over to Broken Banks and there's hell to pay. They've sent for you."

"Is he dead? Is Gus dead?" Colonel Macie asked, ghastly pale in the lamplight. "Have they got the murderer?"

"No, Gus ain't dead. At least he wasn't when I started. They telephoned across that he was conscious and wants to see you. No, they ain't got John Brent yet. But they're out after him. He'll be accounted for before morning, I reckon. It's a bad business, Colonel, all round. Climb in; climb in. I reckon they can send your horse home for you. We got to put right out for Broken Banks. That's him standing there

at the top of the steps, ain't it?" he asked in an undertone. "I wonder what he thinks about this business? Git along out of this!" he cried, urging his horse into a swift trot. "You needn't think you done your stint yet, sah; no, sah." And Mr. Fox steered his course away into the night, hurrying Colonel Macie to the bedside of the wounded editor.

As Doctor Brent turned to reenter the house he became aware that he held something in his right hand. It was a copy of a newspaper which Colonel Macie must have thrust upon him during the excitement. If so, he had taken it unconsciously. Upon examination it proved to be a copy of the last issue of the *Rappahannock Oyster Shell*. Doctor Brent read it through carefully, but he had nothing to say to his wife concerning it and, whatever was in her mind, she forbore to question him.

CHAPTER XI

JOHN RESENTS AN INSULT

It was while sitting on the porch at Brentwood, for an hour's rest after luncheon, that John Brent glanced at his copy of the *Rappahannock Oyster Shell* which Uncle Isaac had brought from the Cross Roads.

"You didn't happen to hear anything at the post-office about Doctor Brent, the gentleman from up north who's bought Comorn Hall?" John asked as Uncle Isaac lingered on the steps. "He was expected on the *Powhatan* this morning."

"No, indeedie, Mr. John, I ain't heard a blessed word," Uncle Isaac declared. "I didn't tarry to the post-office, for I ain't no manner of use nohow for that Dandridge woman. I heered the boat blow for the landing, an' I seen some folks a-hurrying down to see the old *Powhatan* come in, but 'deed I didn't tarry. I just come on home when I'd done 'tended to my business. A heap of folks that follows the crowd won't have no one to follow their funerals, 'deed they won't." And Uncle Isaac shuffled off to his own quarters.

John had not entirely recovered from the shock of his quarrel with Watt Beverley, and his encounter with Old Hetty was still raw and vivid in his memory. He knew that the hideous tale must now be circulating among the whites as freely as it had circulated among the negroes. But he felt that while he could avoid an open quarrel with the Macies, he could still maintain his position at Brentwood.

But in a moment the public insult in the *Oyster Shell* changed everything. It rendered patient endurance as futile as it was impossible. John had taken up the paper in a

hopeful mood, he crushed it in his clenched hand with every hope and purpose shattered.

This was a thing which he could not live down. This was an open challenge which he must meet at once. There was but one thing to do if he still claimed to be a white man, and the sooner it was done the better. Consequences had ceased to be his concern. The passionate rage which he had striven to control would be controlled no longer.

He rose and went into the house. His mother was in the drawing-room, idly touching the keys of the spinet. John slipped past the door, ran up the stairs, took something that glittered from the drawer of his bureau, looked about the room with blind unseeing eyes, went down the stairs, paused irresolutely at the low door of the drawing-room, hesitated, and then entering crossed quickly to his mother and put his arms about her.

Miss Constance looked up and smiled, her trailing fingers making a faint discord on the yellow keys.

"I'm going over to see Doctor Carniel, mother," he said huskily. "I don't think I'll be gone very long. Good-by, dear; kiss me before I go."

Obediently she lifted her sweet faded face to his and, bending, he kissed her many times.

"You won't be long, father, will you?" she asked anxiously. "I've seen so many black ghosts in the air to-day. I don't like to be left alone."

She shivered and drew her shawl more closely about her shoulders.

"Mother," John said earnestly, "mother, can you remember anything about my father, anything about your marriage? I never asked you before, dear, but can you tell me anything of my father, any little thing you can remember? I want to know, mother, I need to know."

Miss Constance raised her hand to her forehead in a troubled gesture.

"I see him often and often, but he will not tell me his name. I knew it so well once but now I can not think what

it could have been. I have so many of his letters; I kept every one; but I can not find them in the trunks up-stairs. I know I put them all away carefully but they're nowhere to be found. And I had all those he gave me to keep for him before he died, and I had Cousin Charlotte's letters, too, but I can't find them high or low. He knows that I've been searching for them, for he told me where I'd put them only yesterday. But where he said I can't remember now. Oh, yes, he often comes into this room and sits beside me and holds my hand, and we talk and talk of you. He never can seem to understand that you are my other father. He always says you are his son and mine."

"You can't tell me anything more about him, mother?" John entreated. "Can't you remember where you met him, or where he died? He is dead, mother, isn't he?"

"Yes, he is dead," she answered sadly. "If he were living he would not come so often with the other ghosts. I used to listen for his footfall long ago, and I could always hear it on the stairs. I even knew it from all the others passing on the street. But now I never hear it any more, now he always comes as silently as all my other memories. What would I do if some day he forgot to come?"

"You can't remember just his name, mother, just his name?"

"Of course I can remember it. It was, it was—"

But anxious as she always was to please him her mind had passed to other things. Perhaps the wild storm raging within his own heart had, by some subtle means, laid its shadow upon her, her restlessness increased, her eyes took on a frightened look, while a feverish color gathered in her cheeks. Realizing that he could learn nothing and that his questioning only distressed her, John kissed her again, comforting and reassuring her as best he could as she clung to him with growing excitement, begging him not to leave her.

He would not be long away, not long, he promised her. Then quitting the house he went to the stable and saddled his

horse. Calling to Aunt Jane he said he was going to Doctor Carniel's on an errand and asked her to leave her work and sit with his mother until he should return. He gave so many instructions regarding her watchfulness that Aunt Jane became alarmed.

"I'll go right in now, honey," she said. "But if yo' ma is poorly don't you stay away from Brentwood house no longer than you must. She do get that restless when you is out of her sight I just wishes you never had to go off the place no-how, 'deed I does."

When John reached the Cross Roads Mrs. Carniel, who saw him from her window, hurried out to meet him at her gate. Her troubled face told him that she had seen the editorial.

No, the doctor wasn't at home, she said in answer to John's question. He'd gone straight to the rectory when he came up from the landing with the other gentlemen of the reception committee. He hadn't been there many minutes before a call came to go back in the Forest to see a boy who had been bitten on the hand by a moccasin snake. The doctor had to hurry, for the boy's arm was swelling terribly they said.

John dismounted and going into the doctor's office scrawled a brief note which he sealed and without apology gave to Mrs. Carniel, asking her to hand it to the doctor the moment he came in. Mrs. Carniel followed him to the gate and stood there as he remounted.

"You're going back to Brentwood, John?" she asked with ill-concealed anxiety.

Avoiding her eyes he answered steadily enough: "No, I'm going on."

"Where are you going, John? Tell me, John," she insisted, her alarm increasing. "Oh, John, I wish you'd go right back to Brentwood and wait there until doctor comes. I declare I do wish he wouldn't stay so," she added impatiently. "Have you heard the news about the man who's bought Comorn Hall?" she added, in a last effort to detain him.

"No," he replied indifferently. "I asked Uncle Isaac, but he didn't wait to see the boat come in."

"Then you don't know what's happened. Why, John, the man's a negro."

"A negro!" he cried incredulously, roused for the moment by the unexpected news. "A negro? Who says so?"

"Every one who saw him. There's no doubt about it. They say he's no one in this world but your grandfather's slave boy, Julius Cæsar, who's been a doctor up in Canada. Did you ever hear of such a thing? If it's true I don't know what Mrs. Beverley will do. Think of a negro living there at Comorn Hall. It's awful, isn't it?"

Mrs. Carniel paused, feeling vaguely that her allusion to Doctor Brent had been untimely. Scandal had called him John Brent's father. Looking up she saw John's set face. She laid her worn old hand on his powerful young hand as it held the bridle reins.

"Go back to Brentwood, John," she urged. "Go back for your mother's sake. Don't mind that falsehood in the paper. You've friends who love you and are going to stand by you through thick and thin." Her voice trembled. "We've no son of our own, doctor and I. You've always been our boy, John; don't you feel you haven't friends?"

"I know my friends, I know just who they are," John answered, pressing the hand which had reached up to his, "and I'm going to keep them if I can."

"Then you'll go home and wait till doctor comes," she pleaded earnestly. "Or maybe you'll come in here and wait with me till he gets back."

"No, I can't wait," John answered, and was gone.

Mrs. Carniel stood at her gate looking after him, the tears brimming her blue eyes. Then she remembered the letter in her hand. It was sealed. No knowing when Doctor Carniel would come home, she thought. She called across to the blacksmith shop. She wanted Jake Yutsy's horse and buggy. She wanted to drive back in the Forest to find the doctor just as fast as she could go.

Once clear of the Cross Roads John Brent pressed forward rapidly, taking a road which led across from the Potomac to

the Rappahannock. The sun was still high when he reached the scattering village of Broken Banks.

The Honorable Gus was standing before the door of his office as John rode into the village. There were some loiterers idling along the dusty street. One of them hailed John by name.

The Honorable Gus turned quickly and saw John, frowning and white-visaged, only a few feet away. Retreat was out of the question.

"I've ridden over from Brentwood, Mr. Wyatt," John said, checking his horse close to the spot where the editor stood, "to tell you that you've printed an infamous lie in your paper." As he spoke he drew a revolver from his pocket. "You'll apologize here and now, and you'll retract that lie or you'll take the consequences."

"You damned nigger!" cried the Honorable Gus, drawing his own weapon with a celerity not usual in his sluggish movements, "you get out of this town before I fill you full of lead. You can't threaten me!" As he spoke he fired.

John reeled in his saddle, recovered himself, and fired down upon his opponent.

The Honorable Gus staggered and fell in a crumpled heap in the dust almost under the feet of John's horse.

Having completed the business which had brought him to Broken Banks, John Brent backed his horse carefully away from the prostrate editor, and turning rode out of the village.

No one followed him, but before he had gone far he heard a clamor of voices, and glancing back saw many people hurrying to their gates and along the street toward the figure which still lay prone before the printing office. Suddenly a woman's scream broke the silence. Mrs. Wyatt knew.

John set his lips, and urging his horse to a swifter pace escaped from the accusing sound. When he had left the village some distance behind him he forsook the main road. He knew that presently there would be pursuit.

Riding on, he came to a clearing. Not far away a negro

was hoeing in a garden patch. He dismounted and, hailing the man, told him to look to his horse until he should return. It would not be long, he knew, before the report of the shooting at Broken Banks reached even this remote cabin.

Once on foot he struck off rapidly through the woods. He wanted to get back to the Cross Roads and see Doctor Carniel; then he would surrender himself to the sheriff. Gus Wyatt's bullet had made an ugly wound in his left arm which now became painful. He felt weak from loss of blood and, pausing in the shelter of a thicket, he removed his linen coat and ripping off one of the sleeves, bound it about the wound, securing it in place with his handkerchief.

The sun set and the night came on. A bright new moon lighted his path. It was very late when he reached the Cross Roads, but a lamp was still burning in Doctor Carniel's window. John pushed open the gate, unconscious that he stumbled as he made his way toward the window upon which he tapped softly.

"Hello, what is it? Who's there?" the doctor called from within.

"Sorry to bother you, Doctor," John answered. "It's John Brent. May I see you?"

He heard a muttered exclamation, then in a moment the door was opened and the doctor's face appeared.

"John, my God, boy, where have you been? You've given me the worst scare I've had since the war. I've been at Brentwood twice since we got the news from Broken Banks. Come in. Come in."

As he spoke he drew the young man into the narrow passage and closed and locked the door.

"Has Gus—" John began. He stopped short, then began again. "Is Gus living?"

"Yes, he's living. But he had a very close call," said the doctor. He looked at John's bandaged arm. "They told me that Gus shot first, but I thought he missed you."

"Winged me," John answered. "Nothing to cry about."

"Let me see that arm," said the doctor, professional at once. "You sit down there in that chair. Matilda," he called, "will you bring me another lamp?"

John sat down heavily and leaned back in the chair the doctor pushed toward him.

"I'm glad I didn't kill Gus anyway," he muttered.

"Now then," said the doctor as Mrs. Carniel entered in a wrapper, carrying a lamp in her hand, "now then I'll take a look at that arm of yours."

John made no movement. The doctor paused, observing him closely.

"What's the matter?" cried Mrs. Carniel. "John, John Brent!"

"There, there, Matilda," warned her husband. "Put down the lamp, or we'll have an explosion. He's only fainted from loss of blood."

He touched the wound significantly.

"This is the first good news I've had since the shooting. Gus Wyatt drew blood before John shot, and he'd insulted him as much as one man can insult another. This proves that John didn't shoot him down without warning, as I'd have done without the slightest hesitation if I'd been in the boy's place."

"You going to see that boy through this trouble, Doctor?" Mrs. Carniel demanded.

"I reckon I am, Matilda. Yes, sir, right straight through from first to last, from A to Z, from Alpha to Omega, from Genesis to Revelations."

"Amen," fervently responded Mrs. Carniel. "There's a good deal more back of this, Doctor, than has come out yet."

"There's a heap more, Matilda."

"They ain't no one going to take his part but you and me and Ada Beverley."

"You and Ada Beverley would be enough without me, Matilda, but I don't reckon all his old friends are going to turn against him now. Fetch me the scissors till I cut this bandage loose."

Mrs. Carniel brought the scissors.

"I'd like to cut off Bessie Blackburn's tongue," she said as she handed them to the doctor. "This is her doings. She's always wanted Brentwood."

"I wouldn't give ten cents for her chances if this is the way she goes about it. But we won't talk now, Matilda. I want to get John on his feet by sun-up and there's no time to waste."

CHAPTER XII

THE VESTRY MEETS

By noon the whole county knew that John Brent had voluntarily given himself up and was in the little jail at the court-house awaiting his examination. It also knew that the Honorable Gus Wyatt, though severely wounded, would recover.

Colonel Macie's midnight visit to Broken Banks became noised abroad. A young compositor who was responsible for such typographical accuracy as the *Rappahannock Oyster Shell* could boast, disclosed the significant fact that the copy from which he had set up the offending editorial had been interlined in Colonel Macie's own crabbed and unmistakable handwriting and that the carpetbagger had inserted the most objectionable paragraph.

When search was made for the copy it was nowhere to be found and Colonel Macie stoutly denied all knowledge of the editorial and its authorship.

Miss Bessie herself thought the occasion a fitting one to loosen her tongue, and declared the time had come "when she must put a stop to things." Brentwood, she said, could no longer be left at the mercy of a mad woman and a murderer, as she alliteratively termed Miss Constance and her son.

A few days after John surrendered himself to the sheriff Colonel Macie filed papers asking that the court appoint a guardian for the person and estate of Constance Brent, spinster, of Brentwood. The papers framed the application in the name of Elizabeth Brent Blackburn Macie, who was set down as Miss Constance's nearest living relative.

No one could doubt that Miss Constance was incompetent

to care for herself or to manage Brentwood, and her son's lawless act, which had deprived him of his liberty, made the appointment of a legal guardian imperative.

Public sentiment was divided. For one white man to shoot another in broad daylight, upon "sufficient" provocation, shocking as the incident might be, would not necessarily affect the standing of a gentleman. But for a man of color, be the taint of negro blood however slight, to raise his hand against a white man of prominence, was unpardonable.

Had the purity of John's blood been unquestioned no court in Virginia would have convicted him. But the old slander having poisoned the air, none could tell what might transpire.

Doctor Carniel was permitted to see John in the sheriff's little parlor in the jail at the Northmoreland Court-House. There was no effort at restraint and no precautions were taken to prevent the prisoner's escape. John and the doctor were for the moment the sheriff's guests.

"Gus is better," Doctor Carniel said as he shook hands with John. "I went over to Broken Banks to have a look at him myself. Nobody need worry about him. How's your arm feeling now? You'd better let me change the bandages while I am here."

Then as he proceeded to dress the wound and renew the bandages, he continued:

"I've seen the judge. He doesn't say much, but I reckon, if Gus continues to mend he'll accept bail for your appearance. He thinks you ought to be out to have a chance to fight the proceedings that Yankee rascal is bringing in Miss Bessie's name. That's the real danger you've got to face. If they win they'll get control of Brentwood, and they'll put your mother in an asylum. I hear they've been talking of something of the sort already."

"They'll never do that, they'd never dare," John cried. "Even Cousin Bessie wouldn't be cruel enough to send mother away from Brentwood. They know as well as I do it would kill her."

"They'll not send her to an asylum if I can help it," said

the doctor. "But we've got to fight them tooth and nail or they may do it. The whole thing's a conspiracy. But knowing a thing and proving a thing are very different matters in a court room. Legally, I'm afraid, they have a good many points in their favor. When the case comes up it will have to stand or fall by the evidence. What are you thinking about, John?" he asked, seeing that the young man had ceased to listen. "You got an idea, John?"

"Yes, I have," John answered. "There's just one man who can throw light on this whole business if he'll do it, and he's right here now."

"Who's that?" the doctor asked as he fastened the last bandage.

"I mean grandfather's Julius Cæsar, this Doctor Brent who's just bought Comorn Hall. He could give me a clue, at least. Don't you remember that old story, you must have told it to me yourself, that after mother left Brentwood she was seen speaking to Julius Cæsar in Washington. He must know something."

And then John told the doctor of seeing the old trunk at the landing with "C. Brent" marked upon it.

"You're certain about it? No mistake, John?" asked the doctor, much impressed.

"I'm absolutely certain," John replied. "I can't swear that C. Brent stood for my mother's name, but I can swear C. Brent was on that trunk."

"If that's so," declared the doctor, a new hope lighting his face, "then perhaps some good may come of that nigger at Comorn after all. There's no question about it; he's your grandfather's yellow boy, Julius Cæsar, and he was the last person seen with your mother before that curtain of darkness fell. Most likely he does know something of what took her north. Wouldn't it be a strange thing if that trunk really did belong to her? I'm going straight from here to a vestry meeting at Weyanoke Church. It's called for eleven o'clock this morning. Suppose I drive down to Comorn Hall after it's over. We mustn't let the grass grow under our feet or that

man Macie'll be there before us. The thing we've got to do is to get you bailed out of here just as soon as we can and then sift this whole matter to the bottom. Perhaps Doctor J. C. Brent is the very man to help us."

He moved to the door, then turned back to say:

"I almost forgot to tell you: Ada Beverley came over from Piccadilly and she's staying at Brentwood with your mother. Miss Page came along, too, so you needn't worry about things at home. Ada does your mother more good than anybody else, and Miss Page has her mind made up and knows exactly what she's going to say to your Cousin Bessie if she ventures to show her face at Brentwood. I understand she said she'd take the broomstick to her."

The doctor laughed and then hurried off to Weyanoke Cross Roads full of the importance of seeing Doctor J. C. Brent as soon as possible.

On this occasion the vestry met in the old church. The meeting proved to be a full one, but the gentlemen, though prompt enough to arrive, were slow in settling to their work. The little neighborhood had seldom been so excited and it was only natural that secular concerns should receive a measure of attention before the affairs of the parish came up for serious consideration.

Mr. Braxton had just finished the brief prayer with which the formal meetings of the vestry were always opened, when the brisk approach of wheels was heard and the victoria from Comorn Hall drew up before the church.

The vestry peering in some disorder from the windows saw, with mingled wrath and consternation, the recently elected vestryman alight.

"Damn his infernal impudence," said Judge Beckford, with no apology to Mr. Braxton. "The confounded nigger's coming to the vestry meeting. What are we going to do about this, gentlemen?"

"Ask for his immediate resignation and settle matters once for all," said Major Blackburn. "He can't act on this vestry for five minutes if I have anything to say about it." He

turned to Judge Beckford. "You'd better be the spokesman for us, Judge."

"Yes, let the judge do the talking," said Colonel Washington. "And I reckon I'd better speak to him about deeding Comorn back to Cousin Jinny." His face wore a look of trouble and anxiety rarely to be seen upon it, his heart was heavy thinking of the humiliating mortgage which hung, like the sword of Damocles, above the home of his affections.

Mr. Braxton said nothing but moved toward the door to receive Doctor Brent. An expectant silence fell upon the gentlemen of the vestry.

The door was opened from without.

"Good morning, Mr. Braxton," Doctor Brent said as he entered. "Good morning, gentlemen. I understood there was to be a vestry meeting and since you have done me the honor to make me one of you I felt it only due your kindness to be on hand. I hope I am not late."

He paused and smilingly surveyed his fellow vestrymen.

Colonel Washington made a sign to Judge Beckford.

"Your election to this vestry," Judge Beckford began impressively, "was the result of a misapprehension, a misapprehension of which you were at no pains to disabuse us. It seems to me that you have taken advantage of the vestry of this church, and that the best thing you can do now is to resign immediately. By doing so you will relieve yourself from a false position and save us from embarrassment. I believe I speak not only for myself but for all the gentlemen of the vestry."

The gentlemen bowed their heads in acquiescence.

There was a moment of heavy silence. Doctor Brent's eyes turned slowly from one to another waiting for each to speak, but no word of modification or dissent was added to Judge Beckford's presentment of the case.

"It looks to me, gentlemen," he began at last, speaking with admirable composure, "as if my old friend, Judge Beckford, has pretty well voiced the sense of this meeting." He paused

and then added quietly: "I presume I am right in supposing that you've only got one thing to urge against me; that I'm a colored man."

"That's not the point I made," Judge Beckford blustered hastily. "I said you had been elected under a misapprehension. You know as well as I do that no negro has ever belonged to the vestry of Weyanoke Church. And I think you know, or should have known, that no negro could be admitted to our number now. You did know it, and I say you deliberately led us into this error, and that the only thing that's left for you is to resign immediately." Judge Beckford's face was purple as he finished speaking.

"But if I don't choose to resign, sir, if I don't choose to recognize your right to draw the color line in matters of religion; if my principles are opposed to Jim Crowism in the church; what course will you and your fellow vestrymen pursue?" Doctor Brent demanded.

"In that case I'm afraid we shall be compelled to take steps to force you to do so," Judge Beckford answered hotly. "You will never be allowed to serve on this vestry, make up your mind on that point once and for all."

"I won't resign," cried Brent with sudden passion, his swarthy face flaming as the blood mounted to his temples. "Take your steps. Compel me if you can. Try it, and I'll show you if a colored man has any rights a white man must respect in this part of the world. Try it and let us see."

All the gentlemen were on their feet in an instant.

Judge Beckford turned to his friends with a fine gesture.

"I move that the name of J. C. Brent be erased from the records of this vestry, and that we elect Mr. Watt Beverley of —" He hesitated for he saw the smile of triumph quivering on Brent's lips. "Of Beverley's Neck," he added lamely, "to fill the vacancy."

Doctor Brent turned to Mr. Braxton, who stood pale and ill at ease beside Judge Beckford.

"Am I to understand that you condemn me without a hear-

ing? Is this your Christian tolerance?" he asked. He had regained his composure and with it a certain impressive dignity of bearing.

"We will hear any answer you have to make to Judge Beckford," Mr. Braxton said. "What are your qualifications for this office, and why did you leave us in ignorance as to the facts of your race and origin, knowing as you must how vitally important such information would have been to us? We will hear anything you have to say." He turned to the others. "Gentlemen, be seated."

Thus adjured the vestrymen of Weyanoke sat solemnly down in the old high-backed pews, and for the first time in the history of the church a negro stood up in the stone paved aisle and addressed them.

"As to my qualifications there is one point at least which I can make. Gentlemen, I am a man of means." Brent paused and let the effect of his fine person tell upon the half shabby group before him. "I am a man of means," he repeated, "and money, I believe, is as important and as scarce here nowadays as it is in most places. From what Mr. Braxton wrote I judge you need it badly. You have accepted some of mine already." He was conscious that the gentlemen of the vestry winced at this allusion, and he proceeded with increasing confidence. "I could do as much for the support of this old church as any man here can afford to do. I could do just as much as you ever hoped that I might do when you elected me to this vestry because you thought I was a rich white man from the North. As to my character and standing, I am a respectable professional man with a long record as a practising physician in the city of Montreal. It is an honorable record. Doctor Carniel can easily satisfy himself of that, and a physician is, by courtesy, a gentleman. You say you wouldn't have elected me to this vestry if you'd known I was a man of color, and you blame me for not writing you to that effect. But I deny that in the United States a man must say whether he is black or white every time he writes a letter. My claim is that if he can fill the requirements of good society he is entitled

to take his place in any station to which he may attain. That is just. You have only your prejudices to set against it, and I tell you, gentlemen, it is high time you began to put them aside. They are not worthy of you, and they are obsolete. I came down here, back to my old home, just as any man might come, and the very first thing I'm brought face to face with is the race question. I want you gentlemen to remember that it was you who raised this issue and not I. I came with the very best intentions and I was met with contempt and with derision. If I'd come back a poor man with just enough money saved to buy me a little cabin in a worn-out field, there isn't a white man here who wouldn't have wished me well, but coming as the owner of Comorn Hall seems to have set you all against me. That isn't just. Don't forget, gentlemen, my blood is not all black. Much of it is white. Much of it is the bluest in Virginia. Much of it is the same blood that flows in your own veins. There is not a gentleman sitting here before me who does not know that I am three-fourths of your own color and your own order. Gentlemen, you know it and you can't deny it. And yet you want to shut me out from every white man's privilege because I have a strain of darker blood. It can't be done. I tell you I've come back here to stay, and it's for you to say whether we'll be friends or not. I'm a conspicuous man among my people. You've a chance now in your treatment of me to show you mean to take a fairer stand toward the negro, that you mean to grant him recognition, social recognition, when he deserves it and demands it, as I do. If you turn me out of this vestry you humiliate me publicly for no fault of my own, and as surely as you do it I will fight you in the courts. I'll sue you for defamation of character and I'll get damages. If I lose in one court I'll carry my case to a higher. I'll carry it to the highest tribunal in the land if it is necessary to do so to get justice. Gentlemen, I warn you, you'll do better to make a friend of me than to make me an enemy."

As Doctor Brent paused Judge Beckford rose.

"Gentlemen," said the judge, speaking with great delibera-

tion, "I think we have heard enough of this. Doctor Brent is welcome to his theories and to his own excellent opinion of himself. I share neither. You have heard what he threatens. For my part I say to him, let him do as he pleases. The circumstances are peculiar or I tell you frankly I would have cut him short before he was half through. I move that we erase the name of J. C. Brent from our records and take the consequences whatever they may be."

"I second the motion," said Captain Fauntleroy.

Mr. Braxton rose.

"All those in favor of the motion will signify their approval by saying aye."

"Aye," answered the vestrymen of Weyanoke in chorus.

"The ayes appear to have it and the motion is carried," declared Mr. Braxton. He turned to Doctor Brent. "Good morning, Doctor Brent," he said.

Almost before he knew it Doctor Brent was outside the church and the door had closed upon him. Glancing back he was surprised to find that Colonel Washington had followed him.

The colonel drew Doctor Brent aside well out of hearing of Beecher Mably, who now acted as Brent's coachman.

"You see how it is," he began when Doctor Brent paused in evident unwillingness to follow him farther. "You see how it is. This is going to end badly all around. You'd better reconsider the whole matter. You'd better deed Comorn back to Mrs. Beverley. You know its history. You know the family, and you know that you could never have bought the property if Mrs. Beverley or her children had known that you were once a slave on the old place. You'd better think it over. If you stay here you don't know what you may be led into that you may regret. It isn't just to your wife. She's a northern woman. She doesn't understand conditions in the South. It isn't just to your children. They'll have no chance if you ever bring them down to Comorn. Up there in the North, or up in Canada, they don't know anything about our troubles. Go back there with your wife and family

while you can. It's going to be no easy matter to raise the money to buy Comorn back. What you paid down was turned over at once to clear up the mortgage and to pay old debts; and there's the mortgage you hold on Piccadilly. But if you'll agree the money will be found somehow. Don't give me your answer now. Think it over. Think it over," urged the colonel.

"There's nothing to think over," Brent said stubbornly. "I've bought the place. It's mine, whether I'm black or white, and I mean to keep it." He got heavily into his victoria. "Drive to my home," he said. "Drive back to Comorn Hall."

Young Mably drew the horses about sharply, the carriage turned and rolled swiftly away down the road, the dust rising in clouds about the glittering wheels which flashed in the sunlight.

Colonel Washington watched it vanish and then slowly re-entered the church.

"He won't let Cousin Jinny have Comorn," he said. "He'll hold on to it and fight us all. That's the nigger in him. I don't reckon any of us can see where this business is going to end. I don't know what's ahead of us, dogged if I do."

CHAPTER XIII

DOCTOR CARNIEL VISITS DOCTOR BRENT

As Doctor Brent brooded over the insult to which the vestry of Weyanoke had subjected him a feeling of bitterness filled his heart of which he could not have believed himself capable a few days before. His hitherto triumphant respectability had been publicly outraged and set at naught by a handful of decayed aristocrats who did not even appreciate that their sun had set forever. A new order of things was at hand, of that he was certain, but the old order, he found, could still administer a stinging blow. The old fences might be rotting and falling down, but some remained with their posts firmly set, insurmountable obstacles in the path of the negro whose ambition was social equality.

Scarcely recovered from the humiliating experiences of his arrival, his pride and self-satisfaction were so shattered that he could no longer find a refuge in self-complacency. Even the thought that he was a richer man than any of those who had put this indignity upon him held small comfort now. His white wife, the ownership of Comorn Hall, these now were insufficient bulwarks for his vanity. He felt a need for some immediate and telling retribution. He wished to visit some speedy and vivid vengeance on his arrogant neighbors.

Happen what might, he would never give up Comorn Hall. The mere fact of his ownership was, he knew, gall and wormwood to almost every white man in the community.

So lost was he in his bitter reflections that he did not look up as the carriage passed Comorn Old Gate, nor indeed did he appreciate that he was on his own land until the horses were brought to a sudden stop.

"Why don't you drive on?" he called to Beecher Mably with sharp annoyance.

"She's right in the middle of the road," the boy answered. "Great Redeemer!" he added helplessly. "I declare if she ain't got hold of the bridles!"

Brent leaned from the victoria. Standing at the horses' heads he saw a tall gaunt negress, about whose hair a faded yellow handkerchief was twisted turban-like. A sharp reprimand sprang to his lips, but something strangely familiar in the poise of the figure checked his utterance and he remained silent, staring at the woman.

Old Hetty was the first to speak.

"'Deed I done reckon I took you by surprise," she said, regarding Brent with the utmost assurance. "I'se been a-waiting for you, honey, yes, I has, I intencioned on meeting up with you afore the day was done. I seen you driving out like a lord and I knowed you'd come a-driving back. Light down, I wants to talk to you a little, 'deed I does."

"I'm sorry, but I've no time to stop now," Brent answered. "Come to the Hall to-morrow if you wish to see me."

"'Deed you'd better light down, honey," Old Hetty urged. "'Deed you had. Come on out of your grand carriage and walk the road a piece with me. That child can carry your horses back alone."

Brent obeyed.

"Well?" he asked when he knew that Beecher Mably was safe beyond hearing. "Well, what is it I can do for you?"

"Doan' yo' know me, Julius?" the woman droned, laying her hand upon his arm. "Doan' you know your own mammy? I'se your ma, I is."

"My God!" Brent cried, retreating a step in sudden consternation. "Is it you? I thought you were dead twenty years ago."

The woman laughed.

"I ain't dead yet, praise God! 'Deed I isn't, an' I ain't a-gwine to die for a long spell neither. I had one stroke, but it takes three for to lay you low. I reckon my grave clothes ain't measured nor cut nor made up yet. Ain't you glad to see your own mammy? I knowed the good God done sent me

back to old Northmoreland for some reason, but I didn't expect to see my boy Julius a-living at Comorn Hall like the Beverleys of old, lording it in the land where he was born a slave. Looks like Old Hetty's gwine to see times yet, 'deed if it doan'. Bless God! Bless God!"

His mother! Far as he had climbed there was a short cut back to the old conditions. The past was at his elbow. It confused his purpose. It entangled him.

"You haven't been to the house yet?" he asked her hoarsely.

The woman laughed a knowing laugh.

"'Shamed of your old mammy, ain't you? You'se a proud nigger, you is. No," she reassured him, "no, I ain't been to Comorn Hall house yet, but I'll be there afore long. I'se seen your white wife a-coming an' a-going, an' a-coming an' a-going, an' I'se seen the one folks calls your boy."

"My boy?" Brent asked incredulously. "You couldn't have seen him. My son Eugene's in Europe now."

Old Hetty laughed again.

"That ain't the one I'm a-talking about, Julius. I'm a-talking about crazy Miss Constance's boy at Brentwood. Young John Brent that shot Gus Wyatt at Broken Banks the day you came because Gus said he was a nigger; printed it into his paper, so folks say. Yo' his pa, Julius, so folks say."

Suddenly as his mother rambled on the whole situation flashed across Brent's mind with all its latent possibilities. He wondered that he had not grasped it sooner in its full significance. Probably there was no one now living but himself who knew Miss Constance's story. If this were so he could make himself the absolute master of John Brent's destiny and through John Brent he might control the destiny of others. He might punish, he might reward. Here was a weapon ready to his hand.

It flattered him that his dark finger should at once be laid upon a spot so vital to the life of the community. In a better mood he would have repelled such thoughts, but outraged and bitter as he was, he welcomed them.

He was so lost in consideration of the possibilities which

crowded upon him that for the moment his mother was forgotten. Her persuasive voice recalled him. She was regarding him with lifted eyebrows.

"What you gwine do for your old mammy now you have come back, Julius?" she asked. "An' there's your brother Hamp. Hamp's a-living in the cabin yonder beyond the gate. It's your land now. I reckon you won't charge Hamp no rent. Ain't you a-gwine to do nothing for your ma?"

Thus appealed to Brent drew an old-fashioned wallet from his pocket and opening it took out two bills, which he handed to his mother.

"Get yourself a decent dress, and if you want to see me send me word," he said.

"I'se a-staying with Hamp now," she answered, rolling the bills which he had given her about her shiny fingers. "Lord, how times is changed! My little yellow boy Julius Cæsar king of Comorn now. His pockets bustin' with money an' a white wife a-waiting for him in his mansion house. It's gwine to shake the land, 'deed it's a-gwine to shake the land. I been looking for a sign, but I didn't look for no such sign as this." She paused and her eyes, which had been staring into vacancy, sought her son's face again. "What you gwine do about that boy folks calls your son?" she asked. "Is you gwine let him lie there in jail unfriended or is you gwine take up his part an' see justice done?"

"Leave that to me," said Brent.

Feeling perhaps sufficiently content with the results of her meeting with her son, Old Hetty let him go his way and forbore to importune him further.

When Brent reached the Hall he found his wife busily engaged in establishing the Mably girls, Jasemine Mamie and Susie in the posts vacated by Aunt Rachel and her daughter Tillie.

Uncle Robert Jackson had left the Picket houses, as the little lodges at Comorn Gate were sometimes called, and had moved with his family to a cabin near Avalon.

It was mid-afternoon when Jasemine Mamie ushered Doc-

tor Carniel into the library. Brent was seated at his desk apparently busy with his papers, but he rose at once and, bowing slightly, remained standing. He did not offer his visitor a chair; his manner was one of studied coldness and reserve. He wondered what errand brought the old physician. He would give him but a short hearing if he came as spokesman for the vestry.

Doctor Carniel did not leave him long in doubt.

"It will be better if I come to the point at once," he began, a chill creeping over him, he knew not why. "You must have heard of the shooting of Mr. Wyatt by young Mr. Brent the day you came." He hesitated, and then looking Brent squarely in the face, continued. "You can hardly have failed to hear something of the cause of the trouble."

Brent met his look and baffled it.

"I am not unfamiliar with that aspect of the case, I believe," he answered with deliberation.

And as he spoke he realized that he had come to a great turning point in his life. To the moment of decision. The day before he would have hesitated. To-day he could not relinquish the weapon in his hand.

"I presume, sir, you have come to me as young Mr. Brent's natural if not his legal protector to ask my advice and my assistance. No doubt you want me to help him out of this trouble in which he has so recklessly involved himself. Well, sir, if bail is needed, I stand ready to go upon his bond at any time, or I'll advance money for his lawyers' fees." He regarded Doctor Carniel benevolently. "Do I understand John sends you to me now?"

Doctor Carniel was ashen.

"Am I to understand that you confirm this slander?" he demanded in a voice which shook with the conflict of his emotions. "Am I to understand that you are acting in the interests of Colonel Macie, perhaps under his advice?"

"Colonel Macie?" Brent repeated. "What has Colonel Macie to do with this affair?"

"The man is Bessie Blackburn's husband," said the doctor.

"And if John Brent is not his mother's legal heir then Mrs. Macie is, and Brentwood and everything that's in it goes to her. That's what is back of all this. Macie and his wife intend to rob John Brent of the Brentwood property. Are you going to help them to do it? That's the question that's brought me here to-day."

As Doctor Carniel spoke Brent saw a new aspect of the case. Suppose he permitted Macie to succeed. Would he not then hold the carpetbagger also in his power? New vistas opened before him.

"You don't answer me," said Doctor Carniel. "Perhaps I've come too late. Perhaps you have already made your terms with that damned Yankee."

Anger was carrying Doctor Carniel to far greater lengths than his cooler judgment would have sanctioned.

Doctor Brent remained outwardly composed. In this matter, at least, he was the absolute master of the situation.

"Colonel Macie has never spoken to me on this subject," he answered steadily. "I have never seen Colonel Macie but once, and that was on the night I came. He left this house immediately on learning of the shooting. He never mentioned the unfortunate young man to me nor in my hearing. Your insinuation has no foundation, sir."

"My insinuation!" cried Doctor Carniel. "What is my insinuation to yours! Answer my question, if you please. Do you dare to confirm this scandalous falsehood which has been set on foot to defame a helpless woman and to ruin an honest boy?"

Doctor Brent made no answer, but passing into the hall crossed to the great door and called to Beecher Mably to bring Doctor Carniel's horse to the steps. When he reentered the library his face wore a look of mild but injured benevolence.

"I see you're very much out of temper, Doctor," he said in a suave smooth voice. "And so I won't detain you any longer now. Perhaps we may speak of this matter at another time. Meanwhile if your young friend needs assistance let him come to me. I promise you I shan't refuse it."

As he spoke he moved to the window and looked out. He was evidently waiting with some impatience for Beecher Mably to bring up the buggy.

"You won't give me a plain answer?" Doctor Carniel persisted.

"No, sir, I won't," Brent replied, still looking from the window where he stood with his back turned toward the old physician. "I don't recognize your right to question me. I tell you once and for all I neither confirm nor deny anything. This is a personal matter, sir, and I positively decline to be interrogated."

Doctor Carniel heard the wheels of his buggy crunching the gravel of the well-kept drive. Beecher was bringing up his horse with unusual celerity. He controlled his rising anger as best he could.

"Before I go perhaps you'll tell me how it happens that you have a trunk in your possession marked 'C. Brent'?" he asked deliberately.

He was certain that the burly figure in the window started. There was a moment's silence, then Doctor Brent answered without turning:

"You are mistaken. I have no such trunk in my possession."

"You say you have not," Doctor Carniel began bluntly. "But a trunk with that name upon it was seen at Weyanoke Landing. John Brent happened to be on the wharf. He saw the name himself. 'C. Brent.' I think he has a right to know how that trunk came into your possession and what it holds to-day."

Doctor Brent turned from the window and regarded Doctor Carniel with the same look of injured benevolence with which he had sought to disarm him before. He shook his splendid head in gentle deprecation.

"Now, Doctor, Doctor," he said, as though he were soothing a restless child, "don't let us make a mystery of nothing. I remember hearing all about that trunk. Mrs. Brent wrote me that it had been pretty nearly broken open at the wharf.

It is marked 'C. Brent' just as you say. Only there's a J. that goes before the C. Yes, sir, J. C. Brent, that's what's stenciled on both ends of that old trunk, and of course, J. C. are my own initials. Perhaps the J. was covered up by something, or perhaps it has worn off a little, or most likely our young friend didn't notice it. No, no, Doctor, there's no mystery about that old trunk of mine."

He glanced again from the window.

"I see the boy has brought your horse round to the steps, and I won't detain you any longer now. Good afternoon, sir. Next time let John Brent come to me himself. And don't forget when he needs bail I'm ready to go on his bond."

Doctor Carniel turned upon his tormentor baffled and desperate.

"You know perfectly well what you are doing, and you are doing it deliberately," he cried furiously, throwing off the last vestige of restraint. "You know his mother is mad and can never deny your horrible insinuations. I firmly believe you know who John Brent's father was."

"Perhaps I do," said Brent. "Perhaps I do."

Doctor Carniel made a last effort to control himself.

"Times have so changed I don't know how to deal with you," he said. "But this I know, that sooner or later the truth will come out and this lie will come home to you, and that day will be a sorry day for you."

He passed out at the open door, descended the steps and clambering heavily into his sagging buggy drove away defeated.

"The infernal nigger," he kept repeating to himself. "The damned infernal nigger. But I'll get to the bottom of this business yet, see if I don't! Yes, let them all see if I don't!"

As the sound of Doctor Carniel's wheels died away in the distance Mrs. Brent entered the library. In her hand she carried a letter.

"Julius," she said, touching his arm to attract his attention as he stood by the open window looking after Doctor

Carniel's rapidly retreating buggy, "here's a letter from Celia. She's on her way to Virginia now. You or I must go to Washington to-morrow to meet her."

"You go, Molly," her husband answered. "I've got business that will keep me here."

The next day's mail brought Doctor Brent a formal offer from Colonel Washington to buy back the Comorn property for Mrs. Beverley and her children.

Doctor Brent wrote a civil refusal and took occasion to reiterate his intention of remaining a permanent resident of the community. "I expect to live and die at Comorn Hall," he put it.

As he was sealing the envelope Colonel Macie drove up. A moment later he was ushered into the library by Jasemine Mamie.

Brent, knowing instinctively the errand which brought the carpetbagger, was on his guard at once. It was not his purpose to become either Colonel Macie's dupe or tool. On his part Colonel Macie was not eager to approach the subject which so absorbed his interest. He believed in indirection. He reserved his frankness for those rare occasions when he felt he could indulge himself in rudeness. It was not often that Colonel Macie could afford to be himself.

They spoke first of the vestry meeting of the day before and Brent outlined his intentions to the lawyer. He had no thought of meekly submitting to such an outrage on himself and on his race. His threat had not been empty. The vestry of Weyanoke should soon be made aware of that. He meant to take action in the matter. He planned his legal campaign and proposed retaining Colonel Macie as his counsel. It was his purpose to sue the vestry for ten thousand dollars.

"It isn't going to add materially to my personal popularity if I take hold of this case for you, Doctor," the lawyer said after some consideration. "I don't think you stand much chance of winning any substantial damages."

"It isn't a matter of damages," Brent answered, frowning. "I'd like to get damages, and heavy damages to boot, but if

the court awards them to me I'll not keep them. I'll turn them over to some charity. It's a matter of principle I'm fighting for and nothing else. This Jim Crow business has gone far enough down here. It ought not to be allowed to make more headway in the church. I, for one, mean to oppose it. Win or lose, it can't fail to call attention to a most outrageous state of affairs."

"Oh, it will kick up a rumpus, I see that," said the carpet-bagger without enthusiasm. "But if I do take hold it will be necessary to get a lawyer from outside to assist me, and he'll have to be an able man, a man of standing. That will mean a liberal fee, Doctor."

"I'm not worrying about the fee," Brent replied with a shadow of annoyance. "Get the best man you can. I want to show the people of this nation that you can't draw the color line in matters of religion. I don't care what it costs me."

"Very well," assented Colonel Macie. "I'll enter suit."

He hesitated for an uneasy moment and then proceeded cautiously.

"I have some business of my own coming up at the next term of court. I'm applying in Mrs. Macie's name to have a guardian appointed for Miss Constance Brent of Brentwood."

"Indeed," said Doctor Brent, full of polite but impersonal interest. "I hadn't heard of it."

The carpetbagger studied the impassive face before him with a furtive eye.

"You know Miss Constance's son is not her legal heir. Under the terms of her father's will, which contained the old clause in regard to lawful issue, he can't inherit Brentwood or a single penny that her father left." Colonel Macie paused again, but his hearer making no comment, he continued. "My wife, therefore, is the only legal heir and Brentwood, and everything that's in it, must revert to her upon Miss Constance's death."

A silence fell. Colonel Macie looked at Brent while a knowing smile twitched his bearded lips. At last he said:

"I don't suppose they'll come to you for proof of Miss Constance's marriage, Doctor Brent."

"They've been to me already," Brent replied.

He nodded with a ponderous dignity toward the carpet-bagger but his eyes were vacant. His thoughts were busy attempting to grasp and sort the threads of all these lives which crossed one another, the tangled knot of which he alone could unravel if he chose. So long as he was silent he was powerful. If he held his peace the keen shrewd man before him would soon, led by his greed, be as completely in his power as the reckless boy, chafing the hours away in the little jail at the court-house. He was a master of destinies so long as he was silent. He could always speak. He could choose his own hour to mete out rewards and punishments.

"They have?" The startled note in Colonel Macie's voice recalled him. "They've been to you already. Who's been here?"

"Doctor Carniel was here yesterday."

"Confound his meddling," cried the carpetbagger. "What did you tell him?"

"I told him I'd be glad to do anything I could for the young man," said Brent. He paused a moment to permit the poison to eat into the lawyer's soul. The beady glittering eyes were on his face. He knew he had drunk up the insidious intimation with the avid thirst of a dry sponge absorbing vitriol. Then he smiled gently as he added: "But I told him I was in no position, at this time at least, to assist him to prove Miss Constance's marriage."

The two men regarded each other in silence for a moment.

"Then it can't be proved," said Colonel Macie with decision. There was an unmistakable note of relief in his voice which Brent's ear detected.

Doctor Brent only smiled.

Another pause followed, longer than the first.

"It's rather hard on the young man, isn't it?" Brent asked at last. "That clause in his grandfather's will is likely to lose him all his mother's property, I presume."

"It may," the colonel admitted. "Still they can't expect you to swear to a lie on that account."

He was genuinely glad to take higher ground. The oath of a witness for the opposition was always a sacred thing to Colonel Macie. He frequently used it as a sort of bludgeon to beat down adverse testimony.

The conversation halted again while Colonel Macie shifted his position.

"You ought to use your influence with John Brent to get him to go north after this trouble is over. He won't come to any good down here," he said.

"I haven't any influence with the young man," Doctor Brent declared, disclaiming the idea with a wave of his hand. "I don't know him. I've never even seen him."

He smiled and looked away. He would not make his denial too complete, or he might lose his hold upon the wily carpetbagger.

"You know he wasn't born in Canada," he added significantly as he still looked from the window.

"No," Macie replied, "he was born in the hospital in Philadelphia after the fire in which Miss Constance's stepmother lost her life."

"So I've heard," Brent assented, nodding his handsome head again in his ponderous professional manner. He had acquired the habit as he stood or sat at a bedside listening to the account of a patient's symptoms. It was the outward sign of an inward attention which was sometimes lacking. The habit clung to him.

"They talk of bailing him out now that Gus Wyatt is improving."

"I'm glad to hear it. I've offered my services in case they are needed. I stand ready to go on his bond at any time."

"Who did you say that to?" the lawyer asked quickly.

"I made that offer to Doctor Carniel when he was here yesterday. I thought it only just."

Again there was silence. The physician baffled the lawyer. His large benignity, his unruffled composure, the remote height

from which he seemed to view the troubles of the neighborhood, formed an armor which the carpetbagger could not penetrate. He trusted Brent as little as Brent trusted him. But their interests seemed to lie together.

"I intend to drive over to Broken Banks to see Gus Wyatt to-day. I may spend the night there," Colonel Macie said as he rose to go. "Gus is very hard up. I don't know but that, taking everything into account, you wouldn't do well to buy another third interest in the *Oyster Shell* so that you could hold the balance of power. If you ever have anything to say to the people you might put it in the form of a letter and have it printed in the *Oyster Shell*. But if you should decide to buy another third you'd better keep it quiet. You can wield more influence sometimes, and hit harder, too, over another man's shoulder. With this suit against the vestry coming on it might not be a bad idea."

"That's so, that's so," Brent assented. "You might speak to Mr. Wyatt about the matter. I won't take another third interest, that's too much, but I might be willing to increase my interest to a half, if his terms are reasonable. It might make him more kindly disposed to that young man we are both so interested in. Good morning, Colonel. Yes, Mrs. Brent has gone up to Washington to meet our little daughter, Celia. Remember me kindly to your wife. Good morning."

It was with no bad imitation of the courtly manner of the earlier masters of Comorn that he dismissed the carpetbagger from his presence and from his house.

After all, he pondered, as he stood in the doorway, filling its stately proportions with his ample bulk; after all, different as his homecoming had been from his anticipations he did not know that he would have it otherwise. If his neighbors had received him in a kindlier spirit he felt his own course must have been different. The affronts which had been so wantonly put upon him, as he told himself, justified the course which he now intended to pursue.

The tangled threads of many lives were in his hands, and

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he was free to cross and twist and knot them as he pleased. In time his neighbors would learn they could not insult him with impunity. He frowned as he looked over his broad lands. They might not bring him peace but they had brought him power.

CHAPTER XIV

JOHN RETURNS TO BRENTWOOD

In ten days more the Honorable Gus Wyatt was pronounced out of danger and John Brent was released on bail. Until court convened in the autumn John was free.

The story of Doctor Carniel's visit to Comorn Hall together with Doctor Brent's offer of assistance soon became known and inclined many, hitherto skeptical, to the belief that some tie might connect the ex-slave with the hot-headed young man who had been so quick to resent the imputation cast upon his birth by the editor of the *Oyster Shell*.

A little group of idlers were lounging on the court-house steps when John Brent left the jail. At the door he shook hands heartily with the sheriff and his wife and then got quickly into Doctor Carniel's buggy which was waiting to take him to Brentwood. Doctor Carniel stopped for a last word with the sheriff.

"Aren't you coming, Doctor?" John called from the buggy.

Something in his tone caused the doctor to cut short what he was saying.

"I didn't mean to speak so quickly," John said when they had left the group of idlers at a distance. "But I couldn't endure those people staring at me."

"I should have known it, John. It was thoughtless of me to forget it," the old doctor answered tenderly. "But that is just what you must learn to endure, and to endure uncomplainingly. The odds are fearfully against you and you can't afford to shun the gaze of any man. Let them look, and let them see that you've nothing in this world to be ashamed of."

"You mean I've got to have a white man's courage if I want them to believe I am a white man."

"That's just exactly what I mean, John," said the doctor. Presently John asked:

"Do you really think that man at Comorn is in league with Colonel Macie? After all, it may be true that he knows nothing of my father."

"No, I think you're wrong. I'm certain he could tell us all we need to know," the doctor answered with conviction. "But I don't believe there's any open understanding yet between them. The danger is if he keeps quiet now he'll be afraid to tell the truth. Once committed to this lie he'd only discredit himself utterly if after while he turned about and told another story. No, John, I'm afraid we'll never learn anything from Julius Cæsar Brent, unless we get him in a corner. That's my opinion. There is one thing, however, we can do."

"What's that?" John asked.

"Why, look into his record up in Montreal."

"You think there's a chance they could discover something that would help us?"

"Yes, I do," said the doctor. "Yes, sir, I'm convinced of it. Likely as not he went north with your mother. I have my own theory concerning that." He laid his hand impressively upon John's knee. "Take my word for it, John, your mother never would have gone alone. He may have gone with her as her servant. How did he get to Montreal? What took him there, anyway? The thing we've got to do is to get hold of a good lawyer in Montreal. Then we'll put him in possession of all the facts and see what he can discover for us."

"You're right, I reckon," John assented. "But I don't know where the money's to come from to pay for the investigation," he added ruefully.

"Don't you worry about the money," Doctor Carniel broke in. "I can manage that. And you can pay me back when you've straightened matters out."

John tried to thank the doctor.

"Fudge and fiddlesticks," replied that worthy gentleman, taking occasion to "touch up" his steed. "Don't I owe everything I have to your grandfather? He gave me my

start. He was administrator of my father's estate. That is to say he paid the interest on our mortgages out of his own pocket and kept things at Burnt Quarter running on for years. Mother never knew we weren't in easy circumstances.

"It's an old story, but I don't know a better time to tell it again, for the plain truth is, John, I'm going to be your banker till you see daylight. Our great mistake was that we didn't have you made your mother's legal guardian when you came of age. Of course you must file papers now and fight Macie's suit. But it's a point lost. We mustn't lose another."

Arrived at the Cross Roads Doctor Carniel drew up before his own gate.

"I declare it's good to see you, John," Mrs. Carniel said as she lifted her apron furtively to her eyes. "But I mustn't keep you here while your mother is waiting at Brentwood. You're out none too soon," she added seriously. "I've had a visit from your Cousin Bessie this morning while doctor was away."

"Why, what on earth brought Bessie Blackburn here?" demanded her husband in surprise.

Mrs. Carniel gave her gray head a scornful toss.

"She just stopped to tell me there's a new doctor coming to settle near Burnt Quarter. She said she reckoned you'd be glad to know it for it would take some of the night work off your hands. At your time of life she thought you ought to begin to take things easy, and give some younger man a chance."

"Humph," said the doctor, "what's this new man's name?"

"It's a Doctor E. Wilbur Bibby, from somewhere down near Petersburg. It seems he's married to Nancy McCarty, who's kin to the Blackburns on her mother's side. Doctor Bibby comes of plain people, as I gather, so Nancy's anxious to get him away from his family. That's how she and Bessie Blackburn came to strike a bargain about their settling in Northmoreland. They think you're getting old and in your dotage, and can't last long. Bessie as good as told me so herself, I declare she did. The talk's all up and down the road al-

ready. It seems we were the last to hear it. The Bibbys will move in next week."

"Well," said the doctor, unperturbed by the appearance of a professional rival upon his horizon, "all I've got to say is, let E. Wilbur Bibby come. So far as I'm concerned he's welcome. I'll lose all my practise for a month or two while everybody runs to the new doctor. E. Wilbur Bibby'll feel very prosperous, I reckon, and he'll look down on me a little more than's really necessary. But when he begins to send in his bills his patients will drop away like chestnuts in a frost. They'll just naturally starve E. Wilbur Bibby out, and he'll be forced to take Nancy McCarty back to Petersburg to associate with his plain people. Come day go day God send Sunday."

"Washington Carniel," cried his exasperated wife, "do you mean to tell me you're so blind you don't see what's behind this new doctor's coming here just now? Can't you see the whole thing is Bessie Macie's doings? She wants a doctor she can manage to help her carry out her plans. You mark my words, if they succeed in having a guardian appointed Doctor Bibby will be Miss Constance's physician and her fate will be absolutely in Bessie Macie's hands."

"So that's what you think they're driving at," said the doctor. "I see. That's possible. That's possible," and he suddenly looked very grave. Then after a moment's thought he asked: "What did you say to Mrs. Macie?"

"Say to her!" Mrs. Carniel ejaculated. "I told her just exactly what I thought of the way she and her husband had been carrying on. Just exactly what I thought in perfectly plain English, too. And then I said I'd trouble her to step outside the door and outside the gate."

"And what did Bessie Macie say?" the doctor asked, a gleam of amusement lighting his eyes.

"'Deed I don't remember what she said! Something about it's being no trouble at all, in her most insolent manner. 'I'm glad to hear it,' said I, 'but even if it were I'd have to ask you to go just the same.' And I didn't wait for any more

of her impudence either but shut the door in her face. She'd tried my patience enough for one day, I can tell you."

As Mrs. Carniel spoke Jake Yutsy, the blacksmith, crossed the road from his forge to shake John Brent by the hand. Mrs. Yutsy, too, came hurrying from behind her house fresh from her labors at the wash-tub, wiping the bubbles from her arms upon her bedraggled skirt as she entered the conversation at the top of her voice and from a considerable distance, by declaring to goodness she "certainly was glad to see Mr. John loost in the land again, she certainly was."

"Jake's been that down-hearted into his feelings since you been in trouble, Mr. John, he declared he didn't mind the time he'd been so put out and vexed. Ain't it the truth?" asked the worthy woman, appealing to her grimy husband.

"'Deed if it ain't," said Mr. Yutsy.

"I declare it is the truth indeed!" said Mrs. Yutsy. "To think they'd 'a' jailed you to the court-house. If I'd 'a' spoke the word to Jake, Jake'd 'a' took a crowbar and bust the jail door down, wouldn't you, Jake?"

"Me an' Murphy Bird intentioned on doing it," admitted Mr. Yutsy. "An' Grandpap Bird he intentioned on lending a hand to see we done it right, an' other friends was willing to come in an' there was some talk of chasing that nigger doctor out of Comorn."

"It's the truth indeed," said Mrs. Yutsy. "But Mrs. Carniel she set her face against it and reckoned Jake'd better not be hasty. But what's the wide world a-coming to, I said, when they can jail a Brent of Brentwood into Northmoreland County like he was a dog, I said."

As Mrs. Yutsy poured forth her flood of well-meant eloquence, a tall lank figure crossed the road, and, with a propitiatory gesture of the hand, shyly joined the group before the doctor's gate.

It was Murphy Bird, accompanied by the inevitable Salvadore. John shook the mighty hand the poor white extended.

"Evening, ladies an' gentlemen, all," said Mr. Bird by way

of salutation. "Me an' Salvadorie we fetched Bertha, the old mule, over to Salvadorie's Uncle Jake for to have her shoes took off an' her hoofs pared. Since I seen you last, Mr. John, I've been a-wanting to sell Bertha if I can get her value into hard money. Yes, sir, I been a-thinking of parting with Bertha, though I ain't no fault to find with her, so's I can buy a piece of organ music to learn Salvadorie onto. An' I thought if Bertha's hoofs was pared I'd do better when I took an' carried her to Warsaw for to sell her."

A cloud gathered upon the countenance of Mrs. Yutsy. All unconscious of its portent Mr. Bird continued:

"I had a postal from a gentleman by the name of Walker that lives to Warsaw, an' he said he'd heard I'd about made up my mind I'd part with Bertha, an' he felt he'd give as much as seven dollars for her if I'd take an' fetch her over."

"As much as seven dollars," murmured Mrs. Yutsy between set lips. "As much as seven dollars. I declare."

"Mis' Bird's hanging back about parting with Bertha," Mr. Bird explained. "But the day an' time will come when she won't feel she ought to stand between Salvadorie and that piece of music for to learn him onto. It's five dollars cash down, an' then it's two dollars a month till paid for."

"Till paid for," said Mrs. Yutsy with deep meaning.

"An' no expense for feed nor keep, which can't be said of Bertha."

As Mr. Bird paused Mrs. Yutsy rose splendidly to the occasion.

"So that's what you brought Bertha over for?" she cried. "Well, you'll not sell a hair of that mule so long's Sister Sadie says you shan't. You got a pretty bill run up here with Jake for shoeing and mending, and one thing and another. So long's you treat Sister Sadie right an' go by what she says, Jake ain't no complaint to make. But if you was to make a move for to sell Bertha to that man to Warsaw way I'll have Jake take an' attach you to the law. How you going to make a living if you ain't got Bertha for to turn a furrow?"

"I wisht I seen my way to giving satisfaction," Mr. Bird replied with resignation. "I've did my best, but there's a heap o' folks does that ain't done enough."

John heard no more as the buggy proceeded on its way toward Brentwood. He had never been separated from his mother even for a day until his imprisonment in the little jail at the court-house. Now, as he neared Brentwood, he dared not think of what his absence must have meant to her.

Hers was the first face he saw in the open doorway. With a cry of delight she came to meet him, her eyes eager and brilliant. How long he stood with his arms about her, tenderly seeking to reassure her quivering fear that she would lose him again, he did not know.

Ada Beverley was deeply moved, and the clasp of her hand when John at last turned to her held a warmth that went to his heart like the comfort of brave words.

"I was afraid you might be gone before I came, Ada," he said, still holding her hand in his and smiling down upon her lifted face. "I didn't hope to find you here. But I was glad Watt was willing you should come."

She pressed his hand again with both of hers.

"I didn't ask Watt's consent," she answered brightly, though there were tears brimming her beautiful frank eyes, tears which she did not seek to hide. "I reckon one has some privileges when one is twenty. But Watt was willing I should come, and mother too, of course, and Cousin Page came with me. She's here somewhere. Piccadilly is so crowded now that I'm sure Uncle Jim was glad of an excuse to pack us off to Brentwood. They'll be sorry enough to see us come trailing home to-day."

"Why, Ada Beverley, how can you!" Miss Page protested with playful vehemence as she advanced from the parlor door. "Your Uncle James certainly would feel hurt to the heart if he thought you really meant any such thing. He certainly would."

She held out cordial hands to John.

"I reckon you don't know how glad we are to see you back

at Brentwood safe and sound, John Brent," she said. "I did feel a little bit sorry for Mrs. Gus Wyatt, poor thing, but now that big fat Gus is out of danger I will say it's my opinion he only got his just deserts. And if two or three others I could mention by name were to have a good, brisk, old-fashioned horsewhipping, I reckon this community could settle down to the enjoyment of peace and quiet with a heap of satisfaction."

Miss Page's eyes moistened as they rested upon Miss Constance.

"You'll never know how your ma has missed you, John. It's been pitiful. Ada and I just sat right down and cried about it the first day we came. Well, you've got him now, Miss Constance," she added, raising her voice to assist her meaning to reach the clouded intelligence of the frail woman who stood beside her son. "You've got him, now, haven't you? You'll be happy now, I reckon."

Miss Constance made no reply, only pressing closer to her son's broad shoulder as he drew her nearer.

"Ada, have you told John about the young man who has rented your Uncle James' club house on the shore? Yes, a young man from New York. He's going to keep bachelor's hall with Watt, and he's engaged old Uncle Billy Catchiniel to cook for them and keep the place in order. Will wonders never cease? Here comes this nigger doctor buying Comorn and in the very same breath, as you might say, this young New Yorker takes the club house. He came a week ago, but Ada and I only saw him yesterday when he drove over with Watt, and the very first thing I said to Ada, the minute he turned his back, was he is certainly the living image of John Brent. Handsome as a picture. Didn't I say so, Ada? Why, Ada Beverley, you know I said so! Well; but the trouble is, I know he drinks." There were times when, as Colonel Washington averred, it could scarcely be said that Miss Page leaped to conclusions, because she bounced to them. "I know it's because of his habits his father's sent him down here. He wants to get him out of the way of temptation. But he may

have to send him farther than Virginia. All I hope is that he won't lead any of my boys into mischief. If he does I'll certainly have to deal with him in short order. Character is more than club-house rent, though no one knows the value of money better than I do. At first Watt wanted to move out; but the young man wouldn't hear to such a thing. So Watt's to live there with him. Watt says he's a gentleman. His grandfather was old Stuart Hamilton, the Yankee general, whose wife, poor thing, was a Page of our kin. People said she was loyal to the South through everything, and that her husband was jealous of Virginia to the last day of his life."

"Hamilton!"

It was Miss Constance who spoke the name very softly and tenderly.

"Yes, Miss Constance; he's a grandson of old General Hamilton. Hamilton's Brigade was quartered near us on the Pamunkey River when General McClellan was at the White House. Pa said General Hamilton was as respectable as a Yankee could be. But some of the general's men drove off fifty of pa's hogs, and pa never spoke about him after that. But ma did. If ma'd been a man I reckon General Lee never would have surrendered. Pa said he wished he hadn't when he came home from Appomattox and told ma he'd come to stay. Pa felt ma could have put the whole matter before General Lee in another light, the way she did to him."

"John Hamilton," Miss Constance whispered softly to herself. "John Hamilton." She lifted her hands to her son's face and looked at him intently, pushing the dark crisp curls back from his brow. "You are not John Hamilton. You are John Brent who has come home to me. John Hamilton will never come again."

"John Hamilton?" Miss Page repeated. "No, no, Miss Constance, you didn't understand me. The young man's name is Douglas Hamilton, and he's coming again to-day with Watt to take us back to Piccadilly."

Late in the afternoon when Watt Beverley drove up to the

door of Brentwood he was accompanied by the young New Yorker.

Ada, waiting in the doorway for Miss Page to join her, saw John Brent standing beside the newcomer and the strong resemblance surprised her. It was dispelled, however, when Hamilton spoke. His voice, his speech, his manner, bore no resemblance to John's.

"You've wild turkeys on your place, so Beverley tells me," he was saying. "I'd like to shoot over your land when the season opens. If Beverley and I sail round from Colonel Washington's will you take us through your woods some day?" He looked about with admiration. "What a perfectly beautiful old place you have here. No," in answer to a question of John's, "no, I've not seen Comorn Hall; only from the river. What an infernal shame that nigger got it."

He paused abruptly, for, new as he was to the neighborhood, he had already heard the stories which linked John's name with the mulatto's. And John paled and flushed because Hamilton had paused so hastily.

Miss Page joined Ada and came down the steps, and John was glad to turn away from Hamilton to assist her to her seat in Watt's high spring wagon. Ada followed Miss Page, and John lifted her lightly to her place.

"You certainly have been good and kind, Miss Page," he said as he stood beside the wheel. "I shall never forget what you-all have done for my mother while I was away from Brentwood." He addressed Miss Page, but his eyes never left Ada's face.

"We would do a great deal more for you than there will ever be any need of," Miss Page responded warmly. "You are one of my boys, John, you know that." And she shook hands cordially.

Ada gave him her hand, and again he felt a warm close pressure which comforted him more than any words.

Watt gathered up the lines, hesitated an instant, and then leaning down extended his hand frankly.

"We're all on the same side in this fight," he said. "You did your part when you shot Gus Wyatt. I respect you for it. We'd better stick together till we see this matter through. We're all with you, John."

John's hand met Watt's in a firm grip.

Hamilton smiled and nodded, and in a moment they were gone. Only John, his mother, and faithful Uncle Isaac and Aunt Jane remained. The same familiar group which he had known all his life long. Nothing was changed which the eye could detect, and yet a sense of menace and calamity hovered above the place. John put his arm closely about his mother and led her into the house, followed by Aunt Jane and Uncle Isaac. At least there would be a time of respite, fate had declared a little truce. They would make the most of it.

"John Hamilton," Miss Constance sighed. "John Hamilton. He will never come again. Never again."

CHAPTER XV

AN OPEN LETTER

In due time notice was served upon the vestry of Weyanoke Church to show cause why Julius C. Brent should not be permitted to act as a member of that body, and to recover damages to the extent of ten thousand dollars for injury to the character and standing of the said Julius C. Brent resulting from the action of the vestry in erasing his name from the records of the parish; Colonel Macie being retained as the plaintiff's principal counsel.

The first appearance of the family from Comorn after the filing of the suit created a profound sensation. It was communion Sunday and the church was crowded. There were to be several confirmations, the bishop of the diocese was present and the stately service had begun. The congregation though devoutly attentive, had taken an unmistakable interest in the arrival of Mrs. Macie, who brought with her the new physician and his wife. Doctor and Mrs. Bibby, every one knew, were just installed in a little house between Burnt Quarter and Brentwood. The Bibbys were eager to see and to be seen.

Mrs. Carniel, from her pew in the corner, regarded the newcomers with scant approval. Many heads were turned in their direction. Doctor Bibby knelt devoutly and touched the hard molding of the pew-back with his forehead while he slowly counted ten. This preliminary intercession concluded, he rose from his knees and became deeply absorbed in his prayer book, while Mrs. Bibby, in an excess of fervor, counted on to twenty.

Mr. Braxton had just begun to read the first lesson when wheels were heard approaching. They stopped before the

church. Mr. Braxton, glancing up to see who the late comers might be, was shocked to behold Doctor Brent's burly figure advancing down the aisle, followed by Mrs. Brent, pale but resolute, with Celia at her side.

It was the first time the child had been seen in public. Her rich masses of black hair were caught back and fastened with a ribbon of the deepest crimson. Scarcely a trace of negro blood was evident in her regular and beautiful features. She looked neither to the right nor to the left as she walked beside her mother. Very quietly they took their places in the Comorn pew.

In the next pew sat Colonel Washington glaring at his prayer book, upon which, after one hasty glance at the startled countenance of the bishop, he riveted his gaze. Mrs. Washington lifted her head in haughty disapproval. If Mrs. Beverley saw the ex-slave or his wife enter the pew which had been hers so long, no shadow of resentment crossed her face. The shallow triumph of the negro did not affect her, but the tragedy of the woman and the child thus publicly paraded at his chariot wheel oppressed her.

Miss Page, sniffing audibly as Doctor Brent's broad back settled itself within a few inches of her own, divided only by the slight partition of the old square pews, arose and wedged herself between Watt and Bush Washington. Young Hamilton, who held a prayer book at an impossible angle for the eyes of Agnes Beverley, grinned in high relish of the situation and was rewarded for his temerity by a disdainful glance from that proud young person.

Throughout the service the conduct of the occupants of the Comorn pew was most exemplary. They joined in the responses with the ease of those accustomed to the services. When the contribution plates were passed Brent leaned far out, so that Colonel Washington could not avoid him, and dropped a heavy gold piece on the plate.

Immediately upon the conclusion of the service Doctor Brent with Mrs. Brent and Celia rose and moved toward the door before the congregation had ceased shaking hands across the

high-backed pews. There was a moment's pause in the sunlit doorway, and then the victoria was driven up. With stately dignity Brent handed in his wife and daughter and following them sat back at ease, his gloved hand, nobly poised, resting upon his gold-headed cane. Thus they retired from what Brent would have termed a signal victory; from an experience which had been to Mrs. Brent one of the most trying ordeals of her life.

If Brent had sought to create a sensation, he had succeeded to his heart's content. After the congregation dispersed, Colonel Washington and the chief men of the church remained behind to consult with the Reverend Mr. Braxton and the Right Reverend Bishop upon the course they should pursue.

"Gentlemen," said the good bishop diplomatically, "gentlemen, you must endeavor to meet this trying situation in a Christian spirit." And he went off with his old friend Judge Beckford to dine royally from the flesh-pots of Avalon.

The occupants of the victoria were meanwhile rolling toward Comorn as swiftly as Doctor Brent's horses could take them. They were silent. A sense of constraint was fast growing up between Brent and his wife. They were no longer on the old, intimate and easy terms. Brent had never quite forgiven Mrs. Brent for her failure to meet him at the wharf on the day of his arrival, and his resentment was not lessened by her desire that he should accept the Beverleys' offer to buy back Comorn Hall.

His stubborn refusal to see the situation as she saw it antagonized and repelled her. She had always believed her influence over him paramount, but she now encountered a half sullen, half resentful resistance to every argument and entreaty which completely shattered this illusion.

Mrs. Brent was fully as resentful of the attitude of the community toward her husband as he was. But she would not have contended; rather she would have returned to her familiar environment and endeavored to forget the first great humiliation of her life.

She had no secret admiration for her neighbors, such as her

husband felt; she did not envy them. To her their pretensions were shallow, their aristocracy a fable, their neglected lands without beauty, their historic names without significance.

If her husband could have fully realized the fondest ambitions which had brought him back to the land of his birth, she would still have considered his return a mistake.

Brent on his part, alert now to detect the slightest shades of adverse feeling, saw that his wife already began to associate him in her thoughts not with the white men of the community but with the negroes. She was not aware that he saw this, and she strove against the consciousness that she did indeed do so with a fierce inward shame.

It was indicative of something in the nature of the man that he found an unworthy vent for his resentment by heightening the unpleasant possibilities of the situation. He dwelt upon every aspect of the case which could alarm or depress her. And she was as aware of his intention as of the ungenerous impulse which prompted him to take such a petty revenge upon her. It did not occur to Brent that he was losing ground which he might never be able to regain. It never occurred to either that the race question was interposing its strong arm between them. They would have dismissed such an idea as preposterous. Yet the wedge had entered.

Not long after Brent made his dramatic appearance in Weyanoke Church he chanced to meet Colonel Macie driving with the Honorable Gus Wyatt, who was now convalescent. A long conference ensued by the roadside, in which the policy of the *Rappahannock Oyster Shell* was considered and determined.

An open and impartial attitude was to be maintained toward Colonel Macie's application to have a guardian appointed for Miss Constance, and toward the suit which Doctor Brent had brought against the vestry of Weyanoke.

Doctor Brent was at all times to have a voice in molding the editorial policy on subjects of special interest to himself so long as he retained his half interest in the paper.

It was arranged also that the Honorable Gus, in his capacity

as editor, should publicly invite Doctor Brent to state his views on certain matters of great local importance in the columns of the *Oyster Shell*, that his neighbors might have a better understanding of his position. Brent could in this way review his history, and make clear the motives which prompted his return to Virginia. He could also state his attitude toward his neighbors and fully explain to the world at large the true reasons why he had filed the suit against the vestry of Weyanoke Church.

In short, Brent was to be asked to write a letter to the paper in which he could give full expression to the nobility of his character and motives, and also give expression to certain ideas he cherished regarding the negro problem to which latterly he had been devoting much serious attention.

Slowly the conviction was coming home to Brent that it must be as the Moses of his people that he would reach the loftiest heights, from which he could look down pityingly upon those who had rejected him. The prospect dazzled him and he longed to give public expression to the conclusions he had reached.

The next issue of the *Oyster Shell* gave the ex-slave his cue in a carefully worded editorial, in which it was intimated that it would be better for all concerned if the two races could come to a more thorough understanding of each other, further suggesting that it would be interesting to have an expression of views from such a man as Doctor J. C. Brent of Comorn Hall, now one of the most prominent members of his race residing in Virginia. The impartial columns of the *Oyster Shell* were thrown open to the discussion of this vital topic.

Doctor Brent was not slow in availing himself of the invitation and the next issue of Mr. Wyatt's weekly contained the following letter printed in a conspicuous position on the editorial page, immediately following a few words of introduction in which the Honorable Gus felicitated the journal itself, and the people at large, upon this ready response to his efforts to bring about a better understanding between the races:

"Fellow Citizens of Northmoreland County:

"Born among you nearly fifty years ago, passing the first decade of my life in the condition of a slave, living in bondage in the very house from which I now address myself to you, I have returned after my long absence unreservedly to cast in my lot with yours.

"What, you will doubtless ask, has brought the ex-slave back to the scenes of his servitude? My answer is that these were also the scenes of my childhood and youth; that this is the land of my birth and the land of my affections; it is my native land. Who then shall deem me an intruder?

"If my detractors wince because a once penniless ex-slave returns the possessor of a dignified competence, the equal, at least, of that amassed by any of his neighbors, it is not because to attain it he has robbed them of a single farthing, nor withheld from them the fruits of their labors. No, let them search their hearts as they will, they can find no justification for their resentment but my good fortune; my success is, in their eyes, my reproach. Had I come back shabby and with empty pockets, who can doubt that I would have received the usual measure of kindness and contempt which is accorded to those members of my race who combine harmlessness with usefulness.

"I left Virginia an ignorant youth scarcely able to read or to write my name, I returned to you a member of a learned profession.

"While I was a resident of Montreal, Canada, I enjoyed the good will and respect of all with whom I came in contact. I numbered among my friends many of the most important persons in the city.

"When occasion offered I have traveled abroad. Everywhere I have been received as a gentleman and an equal. I have been sent as a delegate to conventions in the capitals of the Old World where I have delivered addresses to bodies of learned men. My mental vision is not bounded by the floods and fields and the pine woods of Tide-Water. Wider horizons linger in my memory and give breadth to my views. Nor h?

romance and sentiment been altogether absent from my life. There are matters upon which even a gentleman of color can not suffer himself to dwell at length, confidences which he can neither share nor betray, and I may be excused if I touch lightly upon such topics. I have been twice married. My first wife was a French lady, the daughter of a physician long well and favorably known in Montreal, with whom I studied my profession. Some years after the death of my first wife I married the lady who now does me the honor to bear my name. She is the daughter of a highly respected clergyman.

"With such a history as mine, who can wonder that I believe absolutely in the essential equality of the races. There are negroes, many of them, whom I would not expect you to receive in your houses; there are an equal number of the white race whom I would not dream of receiving in mine.

"What I have done others of my race will do, and while I may be the first to return as master to the house where I was once a slave, I shall not be the last. A new condition has arisen. You may not recognize it, but be assured you will have to reckon with it. It can not be ignored. Local prejudice will not long be permitted to retard the evolution of a race.

"In returning to my native land I anticipated a different welcome from that which I received. Instead of being met with consideration I was met with ridicule and contempt, instead of being met with justice I was met with gross insult and injustice, and, even within the sacred walls of the church, insult, ridicule and injustice followed me, and I was asked to quit my office in the House of God, an office which I had not sought, simply because I am a man of color.

"I have brought suit not in a spirit of revenge, of which I hope I am incapable, but because I considered it my duty to rebuke the vestry of Weyanoke Church for its narrow, prejudiced and altogether unchristian attitude. I, for one, can not submit without protest to 'Jim Crow' laws being proclaimed in any House of God. I raise my voice against them. It seems

obvious to me that those who contribute to foreign missions should make the negro welcome as well on this side of the Atlantic as on the coast of Africa. As to the other aspects of the case, I leave them to the courts to decide.

"Meanwhile if my presence among them gives courage to the oppressed of my own race, and stimulates their independence and their self-respect, I shall be well content.

"I must not fail in closing to thank the courteous editor of this paper for the privilege he accords me of stating my views as above. And I wish further to take this opportunity of assuring every resident of this community, black or white, that while my rights and the rights of those dependent upon me are respected, no one will have just cause to complain of

"Yours truly,

"J. C. BRENT, M. D.

"Comorn Hall, Northmoreland County, Virginia."

It spoke volumes for the peaceful character of the citizens of that region of Tide-Water, that twenty minutes of earnest pleading on the part of Colonel Washington, Judge Beckford and Doctor Carniel served to disperse the mob which had collected before the office of the *Oyster Shell* with the laudable intention of wrecking the building, breaking up the press and then proceeding down Beverley's Neck to Comorn Hall to tar and feather Doctor J. C. Brent.

CHAPTER XVI

DOCTOR BRENT IS INTERVIEWED

A few days after the appearance of Doctor Brent's letter in the *Oyster Shell*, the author of that interesting contribution was not a little surprised, as he was walking with Mrs. Brent and Celia on the terraces, to be informed by Jasemine Mamie that her father, the Reverend Mably, as he was known to the religious world, wished to speak with him.

"I'll find him in the kitchen, I suppose?" he asked with some impatience.

"No, papa ain't in the kitchen," the girl replied, a hint of covert defiance in her tone. "'Deed I took an' left him setting in the library."

"Very well," said Brent, "I'll speak to him."

In the library he found the ample person of Brother Mably comfortably ensconced in his own favorite chair. The day being warm, and the reverend gentleman somewhat cramped in a clerical suit of shiny black, he was relieving himself by alternately bestirring the air with Doctor Brent's large palm leaf fan which he had appropriated from the desk, and mopping a greasy neck and forehead with a soiled handkerchief. The picture which Brother Mably presented to the fastidious eye of the master of Comorn Hall was not inspiring.

"I hope I see you well, Doctor Brent," the reverend gentleman remarked as he struggled out of the depths of the great chair to extend a moist and sticky hand.

Policy alone prompted Brent to accept this friendly overture in the spirit in which it was proffered. There was a bland self-satisfaction and assurance in the manner and appearance of his visitor which did not commend itself to him. However, he answered civilly enough, spoke, with some re-

serve, of the weather, and then asked to what he was indebted for the pleasure of Mr. Mably's presence at Comorn Hall.

"I intencioned on coming to visit with you before this," said Mr. Mably with easy confidence, "but I been away holding meetings in Lancaster County, where there's been a great gathering in of the Lord's harvest. But as soon as I got back home an' learned of the trouble at Weyanoke Church and read the stand you'd taken on the Lord's side, I see my duty was to come right over." He paused and cleared his throat sententiously. "It has been with very considerable concern that I have viewed the actions of our white friends toward you, Brother Brent, and I have called to-day to pay my respects, and to tender you a unanimous invitation from the pastor and congregation of Zion Reformed Church to join up with our communion."

For a brief instant Brent regarded his visitor with angry suspicion. But a second glance convinced him of the complete sincerity of Brother Mably's intentions and the frown which had gathered swiftly on his brow melted into his most winning smile.

"That's very kind of you," he said. He inclined his head in a half ceremonious bow. "I appreciate your courtesy."

"Some of our people hung back a little," the reverend gentleman continued, "because you'd affiliated yourself with the white folks, but I said a Christian is a Christian in the sight of the Lord, an' if Brother Brent ain't welcome at Weyanoke he's welcome at Zion Reformed, praise the Lord! So we want you to come an' join with us, an' we want you to bring your wife an' your little girl, an' if Mrs. Brent feels lonely the ladies of Zion Reformed will try to make her feel at home in old Virginia. It won't be like coming among strangers; your mother, Sister Brent, she's a strong pillar in Zion, an' Brother Hampton, an' his daughter, Sister Williams, is members, too."

As Mably rambled on, alternately fanning himself and mopping his forehead and the back of his head, his hearer recovered sufficiently from his surprise to be able to reply guardedly that while he thanked the reverend gentleman, and the broth-

ers and sisters of the Zion Reformed communion, he could not at the moment accept their invitation, as to do so might be prejudicial to the suit which he had brought against Weyanoke. But, he added, he would be glad to drop in at Zion some Sunday evening, and at any time the church was in need of financial assistance he stood ready to contribute.

The present of a ten-dollar bill warmed the good man's heart, and, with the gift of a handful of Brent's best cigars, paved the way for his withdrawal. On the threshold he paused.

"Your principles, as set forth in your communication to the paper, is all right, Brother Brent, there ain't no question about that, but you're fighting a losing fight when you try to make friends of white folks. It took one war to free us, an' it looks like it would take another to get us our natural rights. I'm a man of peace, but it ain't peace at any price, no, sir, it ain't. The next time I see you I want to lay before you a proposition to join our protective benevolent order, the Secret Sons of Gideon's Band. We want you to join up with our chapter. It's a grand order. It pays your doctor's bills if you is sick, an' it buries you in a polished cherry casket, lined with white silk, in a full six-foot deep grave, winter or summer, if you die, an' it gives your widow fifty dollars cash, an' she don't have to show no marriage license neither. No, sir, her affection is all the proof the order asks. It's a great thing, an' it's a-going to be a mighty power. It's agitating now to have laws passed so that all colored persons is to be paid by the United States government for every lick of work they or their people ever done in slavery times. Some folks say it'll load the land with a pension roll five times as heavy as the old soldiers draws."

"I'd be glad to hear more about it," Brent answered as he descended the long flight of steps from the great door to speed Brother Mably on his way. He wanted to get the man out of the house before Mrs. Brent and Celia should return from the garden. At the foot of the steps the Reverend Mably paused again and a wistful look filled his puffy eyes.

"You got a grand pen full of hogs, I see, Brother Brent,"

he said. "You'll hear from most folks around this way that there ain't a better hand at hog-killing time than what I am. I always killed for Watt Beverley when the Beverleys was living here, an' I don't reckon you could do better than to call on me when you want to fill your smoke-house an' to cure your hams."

"I won't forget to send for you," said Brent.

He was glad when the globular figure disappeared from view behind the shrubbery which bordered the winding path.

Rejected by Weyanoke, he had been welcomed by Zion. When he rejoined Mrs. Brent and Celia on the terraces he only said that Mably had come "to make sure he'd be sent for at hog-killing time."

An hour later, as Brent was seated in the library writing letters, a smartly dressed, knowing-looking young man presented himself at the door of Comorn Hall and sent in his name by Jasemine Mamie, who eyed him without manifest approval.

"T. Tuttle Bamford?" asked Doctor Brent of Jasemine Mamie, as he studied the bit of pasteboard. "I don't know him."

"Neither do I," said Jasemine Mamie impartially. "'Deed, I never set eyes on him before."

"Is he white or colored?" Brent asked, remembering his last visitor.

"Oh, he's white enough, I reckon," the girl answered.

"Then ask him to come in. I'll see him," said the doctor, and in a moment he was looking into the small bright eyes of T. Tuttle Bamford, while the steely grip of Bamford, N. Y. C., enclosed his hand with the pinching pertinacity of a crab. This grip of Bamford's never failed to secure the undivided attention of any person who confided an unwary hand to his.

"Doctor Brent," asserted Bamford without compromise.

"Yes, sir," Brent assented. "That's my name. What can I do for you?"

"Ask me to have a chair, give me a good cigar, and I'll tell you."

"Help yourself," said Brent, pushing an open box of cigars toward the young man. "I reckon there's enough left to keep you going. Pick out your own chair. You didn't need to put 'N. Y. C.' on your card for any one to know you're from New York."

"Well," said Bamford, striking a match and lighting his cigar, "you can't tell. They imitate us. I've seen fellows from Dayton, Ohio, and from Peoria, Illinois, who acted like they'd been born at the corner of Broadway and Forty-Second Street before they'd hit the town three days. Say, you're on to me. I admit it. I'm a newspaper man. That is, I was born with a fountain pen in my fingers and a scare head-line under my scalp, and I hotfoot it after the news. Yes, sir, I've worn the pavements out all along Park Row. But I do the Chautauqua act of late; pilot highbrows over the winter landscape. I was out last season with Professor Silenius, the great antarctic explorer. Say, you ought to hear about him. The season before, I piloted Madame Retrex, the great psychic wonder. Say, and she was a wonder. She had a glass eye and a false front, and her subject was *The Material Evidences of a Spiritual World*. Say, don't let me forget to tell you about Madame Retrex, unless you feel you can afford to miss a good thing. But to come to Hecuba. I've been hanging around Fredericksburg and Richmond for the last three weeks, doing some battle-field write-ups, and everywhere I went I kept hearing about you and the suit you've started against some old church or other. And then I got hold of a copy of the *Rappahannock Oyster Shell* in the hotel at Fredericksburg and here I am. I've engaged a room for a few days at a house at the Cross Roads and I hired a buggy from Yutsy, the blacksmith, and drove out. Before I left Fredericksburg I wired the Sunday editor of a big New York daily, and he wired back: 'Great. Get Brent on social equality. Race riot on the West Side now. Get his opinion.' Say, if there isn't a story in your coming back here and the fight you're putting up for social recognition, and against the Jim Crow spirit in the churches, that will make them sit up and take notice in

New York, then I miss my guess. It's good for a full page with illustrations. I want your photograph; have you got one handy? Say, now, that will reproduce well. Bully! And I want a picture of Comorn Hall, and a picture of the cabin where you were born, any cabin will do: and I want a good picture of Weyanoke Church. From slave quarters to manor house, see? And say, I'd like to have a picture of Mrs. Brent, too. They'll make a dandy layout. And I want all your ideas. I've got the article in the *Oyster Shell* to quote from, but I want more. I've got a list of questions here and when you're ready we'll run them over. First, I want your opinion of your neighbors, of what's left of the old aristocratic order which slavery developed. Will it pass away with the institution which created it? I want that straight from the shoulder. Fire away! I can take dictation."

Doctor Brent lifted his splendid head, looked at the young man before him, then looked off into space. "My neighbors," he repeated, "this feeble remnant of the old order, they live their lives in the shadow of a fable. They do not think, they only dream of the vanished glories of their class, and their sole glory was the ownership of slaves. If they go forward at all, it is with their eyes, like those of Lot's wife, turned backward to the old Sodom and Gomorrah. A race that has held slaves can have no future when its slaves are freed. The future belongs to the slaves who have broken their shackles. Show me one nation upon the earth which has held slaves, as the South has held them, and I will show you a backward and a ruined land."

He paused, staring into vacancy with the look of one before whose vision nations slowly passed. He sank lower in his great leathern chair and rested his head upon his hand. He heard the swift nervous scratching of the pencil on the pad; it inspired him. The words rolled forth freely, sonorously.

"Of what does the negro complain? I will tell you. We complain of taxation without representation. More than one-tenth of the entire population of this country is practically

denied representation in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. The laws of many states discriminate against us and seek to set us apart from our white neighbors. We demand the repeal of the Jim Crow laws without exception. That they exist is an unpardonable affront to ten millions of citizens of the Union. You say that this is a white man's country. I say one-tenth of it belongs to the black man. It will be his. You can not keep him from it. It is his promised land and he has entered into it. By your persecution, by your very Jim Crow laws, by your race prejudice, you compel us to remember our race. By your injustice you are welding us into a nation. Who knows, perhaps a hostile nation. You have given us a cause, a grievance, a wrong. Time will give us leadership, and then our passive history will end and our aggressive history will begin. A race does not sleep forever. My race is waking. How was it that Rome fell? Who triumphed over her in the end? The barbarians of the north, the despised inferiors. We, the despised inferiors of the South, are at your doors. Is it not possible that when this empire falls, we shall become its masters? Where are the descendants of the Cæsars? How soon they were blotted from the face of the earth."

"Say, hold on, Judge; I want to burn a little more tobacco," said Bamford. "Say," he added as he lighted his cigar, "but this will be hot stuff when I get it into shape."

He eyed Brent with a new attention as he smoked. The splendid presence, the majestic head, the bronzed skin, the deep rich voice, the native eloquence, a certain sad and baffled solemnity about the man interested him.

"Say, Judge, have you ever done any public speaking?" he asked as he took up his pencil again.

"I've done a little in Montreal, in connection with church work, and I've spoken at some medical conventions," Brent answered. "Why? What made you think of that?" something in Bamford's absorbed attention arousing his curiosity.

"Well, just for instance," the other began guardedly, "there might be money in it, in a lecture tour, when you get to be a

little better known through your fight down here. They ought to go wild about you in the North. You're dead to rights; you'd make good, I know, handled the way I'd like to handle you. Yes, sir, there'd be money in it, a lot of money."

An hour later, Tut Bamford, as he was known among his intimates, and acquaintance and intimacy went hand in hand with Bamford, found himself leaving Comorn Hall the possessor of many new ideas.

By a little judicious exploitation, he thought, Doctor Brent might be developed into what he would have termed derisively an ornament to the lyceum.

Spurred on by this idea, he wrote him up in his best style, with such good effect that a great New York journal devoted an entire page of its Sunday edition to Doctor J. C. Brent of Comorn Hall, and hailed him as a new leader of his race.

From Moses and the Children of Israel to Brent and the negroes of the South was a far cry, but Bamford's undaunted pen spanned the centuries as though they had been years and boldly proclaimed the ex-slave as the only true successor of the great Law Giver.

The result was surprising. The article was copied widely throughout the North, and not a little editorial comment was evoked, condemnatory of the attitude of the South toward progressive and successful men of color, and highly laudatory of the course Brent had pursued.

Jim Crow laws in the church caused people to stop and think. The religious journals of all denominations had some word to say. On all sides great interest was expressed in the outcome of the suit against the vestry.

This incense was sweet in the nostrils of the ex-slave, and he at once began to view himself in proportions of national significance. Bamford sent him everything which found its way into print concerning him in the northern papers.

Trying to Brent's pride as his experience since his return to Virginia had been, he was in no sense humbled. His attitude, which at the outset would have been conciliatory to the last

degree, was rapidly becoming arrogant and bold. He saw dimly a great career which he might make his own and he fairly basked in his new celebrity and welcomed any opportunity to increase it. Such opportunities were not slow in presenting themselves.

Brent's letter to the *Rappahannock Oyster Shell* was hunted out and reproduced in full in a leading negro paper in Richmond, the *Trumpet*, together with an article which warmly commended Doctor Brent for his great work in calling the attention of the nation to a crying injustice. The editor, Samuel Adriance, forwarded a marked copy of his paper, and marked copies of other negro publications in which Doctor Brent's course was spoken of in laudatory fashion.

Adriance also took occasion to write a long and effusive letter asking Brent's permission to call upon him at an early date, when he expected to visit Northmoreland County to see his sister, Mrs. M. A. Dandridge, the postmistress at Weyanoke. Much flattered, Brent wrote at once saying he would be pleased to see the editor of the *Trumpet* at Comorn Hall whenever he should visit Northmoreland County; and he made a special point of speaking with cordiality to the postmistress on the next occasion when business took him to the Cross Roads.

Mamie Ann Adriance, as she was then, had drifted into the locality as a school-teacher some eight or ten years before Doctor Brent's return. She was a handsome woman after her fashion, and when she failed to be reappointed to teach the negro school near Burnt Quarter she succeeded in attracting the attention of Colonel Macie and so secured a position as housekeeper for the carpetbagger, whose wife, the first Mrs. Macie, was a helpless invalid. Mamie Ann flourished at Burnt Quarter; but after Mrs. Macie's death and the appearance of Miss Bessie upon the horizon, Mamie Ann's lot was not cast in such pleasant places, and she extricated herself from what promised to become a trying situation by contracting a marriage with old Uncle Jonas Dandridge, who had for many years acted as postmaster at Weyanoke.

Uncle Jonas was an institution, and it had never occurred to any one, white or black, to seek his removal. He carried on his official business in connection with a little store; after the advent of Mamie Ann the affairs of the post-office were soon resigned to her exclusively.

When Uncle Jonas, grown weary of his labors, and, as was hinted, more than weary of Mamie Ann, chose a convenient occasion to retire permanently from the position of postmaster to the peace and quiet of the negro cemetery, it was fondly hoped that his sorrowing widow might be dislodged.

But fate and Mamie Ann, with the subterranean assistance of Colonel Macie, willed it otherwise; Mamie Ann ceased to be a deputy and became a fully constituted postmistress.

Some resentment was felt, and there was talk of a protest. But presently the matter dropped and Mamie Ann remained in charge. All might have been well, but as a warm friend said it, "There ain't nobody can lay over Mamie Ann for manners when she's got a mind to put them on, but she can't seem to meet up with white folks but she fusses with them, 'deed if she don't. An' every time she opens her mouth she just naturally lays her tongue to more trouble that she can pick up with both hands. I cautions her, an' I cautions her, but she says she's got the United States back of her an' she won't take nobody's dust, going or coming."

Animated by such a spirit, it was not surprising that friction soon developed, particularly when Mamie Ann insisted upon being addressed as "Mrs. Dandridge" and threatened to call Mrs. Carniel and Mrs. Braxton by their first names if they ventured to call her Mamie Ann.

After Doctor Brent's arrival, she became even more aggressive, and it was soon apparent that it could be only a question of time until some flagrant action on her part would compel the long-suffering community to seek her removal. Meanwhile she was all smiles and sweet consideration whenever the great man from Comorn entered her little store. Mamie Ann had her own ambitions; she, too, like Alexander of old, longed for new worlds to conquer.

CHAPTER XVII

HORTENSE

The excitement which Doctor Brent's letter occasioned had scarcely abated when Hortense Brent, his daughter by his first marriage, arrived upon the scene.

Joe Macie, Junior, the carpetbagger's only child, a young man of somewhat doubtful habits and associates, was lounging beside the gangplank as the *Powhatan* lay at the foot of Seventh Street in Washington, when a cab was driven swiftly to the wharf and a girl dressed in white and wearing a wide-brimmed hat alighted. The great whistle blew as she paid the cabman his fare, and directed the porter to take her bags and trunk aboard, and then, crossing the gangplank, vanished up the companionway.

Joe Macie followed the retreating figure with a swift glance of admiration. A few minutes later, when the ropes had been cast off and the boat had cleared and was proceeding on its course, leaving the white dome of the capitol and the gray shaft of the monument in its wake, he went on deck. The graceful white-clad figure was standing well forward, watching with eager eyes the wooded heights of Arlington.

Joe Macie lounged nearer and nearer, shrewdly counting upon the girl's evident interest in the historic panorama through which she was being borne to make some opportunity for him to address her. His reward came quickly.

The girl turned as though to look for a steward to whom she might address an inquiry. Her glance rested upon the young man leaning on the rail.

"That's Arlington," Joe volunteered, lifting his hat.

"Oh, thank you," the girl answered. "Then that must be Virginia?"

Her tone of enthusiastic interest informed him of her sympathies. Immediately a profound affection for The Lost Cause welled up within him.

"That bridge back there is the famous Long Bridge; the Federal troops marched over it to invade the soil of Virginia," he said, and wondered if the effect might not have been better if he had said the sacred soil of old Virginia. He felt almost as though he had lost a point.

"That long black line?" the girl asked, looking back toward the city lessening in the distance. They walked together a few paces toward the stern of the boat that she might see the bridge more clearly. She was very beautiful. Her luxuriant hair grew low upon her forehead, it was full of waves and eddies and rich masses of raven depth. It had effects of dusky smokiness which threw into relief the olive skin which had an ivory loveliness quite indescribable. Her eyes were large and dark and liquid, filled with a smoldering fire; they were like rubies seen through a film of jet. Her lips were full and red but perfect in their modeling, the lines fine and clear though very richly drawn. Her figure was the most beautiful and supple and slender, Joe Macie thought, that he had ever seen.

"That's Alexandria, off there in the distance on the Virginia shore," he made haste to continue, fearful that any pause in his presentment of the historic points along the shores might put a period to the delightful moment of intimacy. "There's an old church in the town that Washington attended, and the old house where the governors met before the French and Indian war is still standing. That's where Washington received his first commission."

"You know the river very well." Her smile thanked him and thrilled him. "Is it far to Mount Vernon? Will it be daylight still when we pass it? And can we see it plainly from the boat?"

"It's only fifteen miles from Washington. We'll pass it in about an hour. Yes, you can see the old house from the boat."

She did not resent his position as he stood close beside her

leaning on the rail. He had a certain measure of good looks and a cheerfulness founded upon high animal spirits which was not unattractive. She was conscious that he admired her, and the openness and boldness of his glance did not repel nor frighten her.

All the stewards who passed along the deck seemed well acquainted with him. Evidently, she thought, his home was somewhere on the river. Perhaps he lived near Comorn Hall. But she forbore to question him.

At Alexandria, where the *Powhatan* stopped to receive both freight and passengers, Mrs. Beckford and Polly came aboard. They had been visiting cousins of Mrs. Beckford's and were returning to Avalon by way of Weyanoke Landing. Coming out on deck for a breath of fresh air, Polly and her mother saw Joe Macie as he talked familiarly with his beautiful companion.

"Good evening, Mr. Macie," Mrs. Beckford said as she passed with Polly toward the bow of the boat.

"Good evening, Mrs. Beckford," the young man replied, smiling and lifting his hat. "Good evening, Polly."

Polly flushed a little, returned his greeting, and with a swift but comprehending glance at Joe's companion, followed her mother.

"That's Mrs. Beckford, the wife of Judge Mason Beckford, of Northmoreland County, and that's their daughter, Polly," Joe explained. "The Beckfords are great people down the river; what they call the blood royal of Virginia."

"Don't let me keep you from your friends," she released him lightly. And then, as he still hesitated at her side, she asked: "You are Mr. Macie? Then I wonder if you are related to Colonel Macie, my father's lawyer in Virginia?"

Joe regarded his companion in surprise.

"My father certainly is Colonel Macie," he admitted. "But I can't think who your father is."

"Doctor Brent, who recently bought Comorn Hall," the girl replied. "This is my first visit to his native state. I know that I shall love Virginia."

In the sudden welling up of her enthusiasm, Hortense Brent did not observe the look of blank amazement which spread over Joe Macie's cheerful countenance, nor did she see the expression of dismay which followed it with singular rapidity.

Presently he heard her asking:

"You do know my father, then?"

He shook himself together with an effort.

"Oh, yes, certainly, I've met Doctor Brent. We all know Doctor Brent down where I live. Yes, of course, we're neighbors."

He looked at the girl. Her great beauty, the simple elegance of her dress, and her air of perfect self-satisfaction and composure steadied him. It was evident that she knew no reason why she should not mention her father's name as the best guaranty of her own position and importance.

The presence of Mrs. Beckford and Polly aboard the steamer placed the young man in an awkward predicament. After Polly's engagement to Watt Beverley had been definitely broken off, young Macie had succeeded in establishing himself upon a certain footing of intimacy at Avalon. Mrs. Beckford encouraged his visits, feeling that his devotion was a refuge for her daughter's broken pride.

The fact that young Macie had been born in the South and, in certain superficial aspects appeared more Virginian than the Virginians themselves, was of assistance to him in gaining a foothold in families where his father's presence would scarcely have been tolerated. Yet he had enough of his father in him to render it unsafe to depend upon his protestations of loyalty to the country of his birth.

Joe knew perfectly well that he should make some excuse to leave Hortense Brent. Polly would think it strange that he had not joined them at once and Mrs. Beckford's surprise would soon become annoyance if his absence was prolonged.

They would certainly expect him to mention the girl. If he told them that his lovely companion was the daughter of Doctor Brent of Comorn Hall, he knew it would be impossi-

ble for him to return to the girl even for a moment without giving mortal offense to both Mrs. Beckford and Polly.

"Curse it!" he thought with hot resentment. If Polly and her mother had not come aboard he might have reveled in the long sail down the romantic moonlit river alone with this intoxicating creature, and have established an intimacy which would assure him her acquaintance after she reached her home. Now, however, there was no alternative; he must renounce the girl at once; and yet he lingered.

He would point out Mount Vernon, and then he would join Polly and Mrs. Beckford and explain his awkward position to them. He would dwell on the fact that her father was his father's client. He could make some slighting remark about her beauty as a palliative if Polly really was offended. He looked at the girl at his side. After all, a bad quarter of an hour with Mrs. Beckford was no great price to pay for an hour with this enchanting creature.

Mount Vernon was approached and passed, and still he kept his place beside Hortense. The twilight came. The full moon rose gloriously across the water, and still Joe Macie lingered.

The dinner gong sounded. Reckless in his new infatuation, Joe went in to dinner with Hortense. Fortunately Mrs. Beckford and Polly were already seated at a distant table. Completely intoxicated by the rich beauty of the girl beside him he was rapidly becoming indifferent to the opinion of others.

"To hell with the consequences," he thought as he looked at her. He had made love in many quarters in his life. It had been his chief pastime; but he had never before found the great game so exciting, or half so stimulating, as it now appeared. It was all the more alluring as he was completely baffled by the girl. There was nothing to indicate the progress, if any, which he was making in her regard.

It was almost midnight when she rose from her seat near the bow of the boat and bade him good night.

Mrs. Beckford and Polly had gone early to their staterooms. At last Joe Macie turned in, and the *Powhatan*, its decks

cleared of all save those who watched its course in silence from the lookout and the pilot house, went on its way down the broad expanse of molten silver, the distant shores of Maryland and Virginia growing yet more distant as the great river widened toward the Chesapeake.

CHAPTER XVIII

DOCTOR BRENT AVERTS A CRISIS

For a time quiet reigned unbroken over Beverley's Neck. The hot Virginia summer faded insensibly into the long Virginia autumn; that loveliest of all seasons south of the Potomac, when one bright day succeeds another from the ripening of the wild fox-grapes to the purpling of the persimmons on the bare branches and the first flurry of snow.

When court convened at Northmoreland Court-House the state's case against John Brent for the shooting of the Honorable Gus Wyatt came up for trial. It was whispered that Doctor J. C. Brent had interceded with the editor, and had induced the Honorable Gus to exert himself rather to save than to convict John Brent.

But the machinery of justice having been set in motion it was impossible for the court to close its eyes to such a breach of the law, and John Brent was accordingly sentenced to serve six months in the penitentiary.

At this time also Mrs. Macie's petition to have a guardian appointed for her Cousin Constance Brent was heard. Miss Constance's evident incapacity to care for herself or her estate, and the enforced absence of her son, rendered the decision a foregone conclusion.

Colonel Macie was appointed guardian of Miss Constance's person and estate. By this decision John Brent was practically declared without standing before the court.

Although Doctor Carniel secured the services of an able attorney in Montreal to investigate Brent's history in the hope of learning something which might throw light upon Miss Constance's story, nothing had so far come of it. There

was plenty of information to be obtained in regard to Doctor J. C. Brent, all of a nature creditable to that gentleman, but nothing whatever which could serve as a clue to Miss Constance's movements during the time of her absence from Brentwood.

Another decision of great local interest was that which awarded Doctor Brent damages in his suit against the vestry of Weyanoke Church. Brent had sued for ten thousand dollars. The court awarded him one hundred dollars, the sum he had first contributed to the church. The judge in delivering his decision said that the case was without parallel in his experience, and that while no legal obligation rested on Doctor Brent to declare his color in advance of his coming and so render impossible the unfortunate circumstances of which he now complained, yet every moral obligation had rested on him to do so. He refused to compel the vestry to receive Brent into its membership.

It had been intimated to Colonel Washington, Judge Beckford and others, that the decision might have been altogether unfavorable to Brent but for the general belief that the ex-slave stood ready, in such an event, to appeal his case from one court to another until it should reach the highest tribunal in the land, in his effort to vindicate himself. Doctor Brent's resources were perhaps sufficient to permit a course so costly, but the vestry of Weyanoke had no funds at their disposal with which to contest such suits, and they were accordingly grateful to the judge for a speedy settlement of the matter.

Despite the court's arraignment of the plaintiff, the award of damages was considered an enormous victory by all the negro papers in the country. Bamford came down for the trial, and Brent again received nation-wide publicity.

Feeling that he had vindicated himself, so far at least as the church was concerned, Doctor Brent cast about for further avenues of usefulness and publicity. He soon hit upon one which opened invitingly before him. He proposed to Mrs. Brent that they should send Celia to the nearest district school for white children.

Thoroughly alarmed, Mrs. Brent protested, pointing out that to do so would merely be to make the child the center of a hideous wrangle.

But Brent, headstrong and determined, insisted that Celia should attend the white school. If she was refused admittance on account of her race, he would carry the case into court as he had carried his grievance against the vestry. He said that he would as willingly fight Jim Crow laws in the schools as in the churches, and Mrs. Brent's appeal to the better side of his nature was without effect.

On the day school opened, Brent took Celia to the little frame building by the roadside over which Miss Page Dinwiddie presided. The bare room was well filled with the children of the poorer whites as Brent, entering, led the unhappy Celia forward to the teacher's platform.

At the sound of Brent's heavy tread Miss Page glanced up from the book in which she was busily inscribing the names of her pupils.

"Well, I declare!" she ejaculated under her breath.

"Good morning, Miss Dinwiddie," Brent said with his most winning smile. "You see I have brought my little girl to attend your school. Celia has never been a student in a public school before, but Mrs. Brent and I feel sure you will be very kind to her." He paused, still smiling his benevolent smile. "You must tell us the books she needs and I'll see that she has them all by to-morrow."

Miss Page, who at first had turned crimson, now turned pale. But her voice was clear and firm when she spoke.

"There are separate schools for white and colored children in Virginia. If any exception is to be made in favor of your daughter, it must be by the trustees of Comorn District. I have no authority."

Doctor Brent frowned angrily upon Miss Page. His voice was distinctly heard by every child in the room.

"Am I to understand that you decline to receive Celia as a pupil? I would like to understand you distinctly, Miss Dinwiddie. Perhaps you have forgotten that I am now a prop-

erty holder in this county, and that my property is taxed more heavily for the support of this very school than any other in this district."

Miss Page Dinwiddie had collected herself.

"There is a school for colored children farther up the road. Good morning."

Having closed the incident to her satisfaction, Miss Page busied herself again with the entries in the book upon her desk.

Doctor Brent turned to the door. At the door he paused. His strong resonant voice traveled back to Miss Page in tones of unmistakable decision.

"You shall hear from the trustees of Comorn District. Good morning, madam."

"Good morning," said Miss Page.

Brent spent the better part of the afternoon shut up in his library writing a letter of protest to the school trustees. Then, well content, he rested from his labors.

The reply was prompt and to the point. It informed Doctor Brent that the county maintained schools for both white and colored children; and it quoted the law.

"The public schools shall be free to all persons between the ages of seven and twenty years residing within the school district, provided white and colored persons shall not be taught in the same school, but shall be taught in separate schools, under the same general regulations."

The trustees recommended that Doctor Brent should send his little daughter to the colored school, which was practically as convenient to his residence as the white school, where a competent colored teacher was in charge.

Brent sent at once for Colonel Macie.

It was decided that Celia should apply once more for admission to the white school. If this was refused, legal action could then be taken. Accordingly Doctor Brent accompanied Celia to the schoolhouse. Miss Page, observing their approach, met them at the door.

"I have brought Celia back to school," said Brent.

"I am sorry," Miss Page answered firmly; "but I have been instructed by the trustees of this school to refuse to receive your daughter as a pupil. Good morning."

"One moment," said Doctor Brent. "You positively refuse to receive my daughter as a student in this school?"

"I do," Miss Page replied with unusual decision, and closed the door with a suggestion of a bang.

In a sudden gust of passion Brent flung the door open, setting his foot heavily across the threshold.

"You will receive my daughter in this school," he thundered, "or no white child shall be taught here while I live at Comorn Hall."

"I want none of your threats," Miss Page exclaimed wrathfully. "I have treated you with courtesy. But don't think for one moment that I'm afraid of you, nor fifty like you. I want that door closed immediately. No negro can come here threatening things and frightening my scholars. I'm not accustomed to it and I won't have it!"

"I don't threaten you," cried Brent. "I threaten the wicked prejudice you represent. You will admit my daughter, and you will teach her, or you will not teach here for long."

Poor Celia wept bitterly as her father led her away, and for a time she wept unheeded. Presently, as his anger cooled, Brent became aware of her unhappiness.

"Don't you mind what they say, Celia. They'll teach you there yet, or I'll know the reason why," he said, trying to comfort her. "Don't you mind, don't cry. The others will do the crying after while."

"I'll never go there again," sobbed the child. "I'd rather die; I'd rather die! Oh, I wish, I wish I were all white."

Suit was immediately instituted to compel the school trustees to admit Celia as a student in Miss Page's school. At the same time Brent wrote a long account of the affair to Adriance, the editor of the *Richmond Trumpet*, telling him of the course he meant to pursue, and asking the support of his paper. He wrote also to his friend Bamford, promising him another sensation. Bamford ran down from New York to

talk the matter over and to get the best aspects of the case for a newspaper syndicate which had recently availed itself of his talents.

Brent's name being already known, wide publicity was given to his attack upon the Jim Crow laws in the schools of Virginia, and no little sympathy was expressed in many northern papers.

Matters had progressed thus far when an alarming rumor reached Brent's ears. For a moment it threw him into a panic. It was Colonel Macie who brought the unwelcome news.

"I've been looking for something like this," the carpetbagger said as Brent stared at him aghast as the two faced each other across the library table. "Yes, I might say I've been expecting it. Of course, if they are serious, you can't go north too fast for your own good."

"Is there such a law in this state? Are you certain?" Brent demanded.

"Yes," said the lawyer, "there is such a law; no question about that. I knew of its existence, but I never happened to know of any case of this sort coming to trial in my own experience. I looked up the law as soon as I heard this talk. I wanted to be sure before I saw you. Here it is." He drew a piece of paper from an inner pocket and, adjusting his glasses, read the lines penciled upon it:

"In *Pollard's Code of Virginia*, Section 3788. '*Marriage of white persons with colored persons, how punished.*—If any white person intermarry with a colored person, or any colored person intermarry with a white person, he shall be confined in the penitentiary not less than two nor more than five years.'"

Colonel Macie laid the paper on Doctor Brent's desk, tapped it once or twice with the tips of his fingers, and looked inquiringly at his client over the tops of his glasses.

"That is the law," he said at last.

"But do you mean to tell me seriously they would dare to enforce it in a case like mine?" Brent protested. "I have been married to Mrs. Brent for years. I did not know of the ex-

istence of such a law when I bought this place, and now that I am here I neither can nor will be driven out."

"You've undertaken to fight the vestry of Weyanoke Church and the school trustees of Comorn District in the courts. You can't wonder if they fight you with your own weapons," the carpetbagger answered impartially.

"Who is back of this threat to drive me out of here or to railroad me to the penitentiary for marrying a white woman?" Brent asked, conscious of a growing feeling of resentment and distrust toward his legal representative. "I want to know my enemies."

"I don't know that I can give names," the lawyer answered guardedly. "But, generally speaking, I might say all the best element among your neighbors. Certainly all the most influential citizens would welcome your departure from Northmoreland County. They claim that you should have sold Comorn back to the Beverleys when they offered you the chance. You've exploded a bombshell among them. They think the example of a man of color living at Comorn Hall with a white lady for his wife must have a demoralizing effect on the negro population. They realize that they're going to have trouble keeping the negroes down when a man of color comes along who stands head and shoulders above most of the white men in the county. And they're right about it, Doctor, from their own point of view. The negroes can't be kept down if they have many such examples. I hear there has been some serious trouble at the post-office already. Mrs. Dandridge has been indiscreet enough to come out as your champion when she might much better have held her tongue. But that is neither here nor there. The whole point is, your neighbors see a chance to force you to leave. None of them cares to send you to the penitentiary. They don't really want to see the law enforced. They just want to drive you away."

"You mean they want to frighten me away!" Brent cried, striking the desk before him with his heavy hand. "That's what they want to do. Is that law constitutional?"

"How do I know?" Colonel Macie parried. "It is the law

of Virginia. It has never been repealed nor overruled to my knowledge."

"Do you think I could fight it?" Brent demanded.

"You could fight it, of course. But you would never win in such a fight; no, sir, not in any court in Virginia. They consider this a life and death matter down here."

"I've got to think it over," Brent said at last. "They can't stampede me, that's one thing certain. So far as you know, there has been no action taken against me yet?" he questioned with some anxiety.

"None so far," Colonel Macie assured him.

"You'll keep me informed as to what my neighbors mean to do?" Brent asked as the carpetbagger rose to go. "I don't want them to catch me napping."

After his guest had gone Brent retained an uncomfortable feeling that Colonel Macie would have been better pleased had he taken alarm and prepared to return to Canada.

Obedying a strong impulse to confide his difficulty to some one who would share his point of view, he wrote again to Adriance telling him in confidence of the move his enemies had in contemplation and asking his advice. He was stubbornly determined to hold his ground at almost any cost, even if he must fight the constitutionality of the law from court to court. There would be immense notoriety in such a course, but the expense also would be very great and might well beggar him even if he won at last.

In something less than a week after Colonel Macie's visit to Comorn Hall, Doctor Brent received a letter from George Adriance which caused him to send a note to Burnt Quarter requesting the presence of the lawyer immediately. Colonel Macie drove over in the evening accompanied by his son, who made himself agreeable to Hortense while his father was closeted with Brent in the library.

Brent's lips wore a confident smile as he again faced his legal adviser across his desk.

"Any more talk, Colonel, about scaring me out of the state?" he asked in his most genial tone.

Somewhat nonplused, the carpetbagger hesitated.

"Well, yes, there is more talk," he said at last. "It's as I feared. They're going ahead. I heard only yesterday that a warrant was to be sworn out for your arrest for violating the statute which I read you the other day when I was here. I was coming over to-night even if I hadn't had your note. I'm afraid it begins to look serious, Doctor."

"For the other side, perhaps, but not for me," Brent answered easily. "It's a great thing to know the law, Colonel."

As he spoke he pushed an envelope across the desk to the lawyer. The envelope contained the letter he had received from Adriance.

"Read that," he said, still smiling his complacent smile. "Read that and then tell me what you think of it."

Puzzled, the lawyer took up the letter and opened it. As he read a look not altogether of surprise nor altogether of satisfaction evolved itself from his inner consciousness and became visible upon his countenance. Perhaps he wished it to pass for a look of pleasure, for presently he glanced toward Brent and squeezed a little wintry smile out of his shifty eyes. But Brent, watching the carpetbagger intently while his attention had been fixed upon the letter, was certain that this evidence of satisfaction was altogether feigned.

"Most surprising," said Colonel Macie as he finished his careful perusal of the letter. "I've heard a good deal about this man Adriance from his sister, Mrs. Mamie Dandridge, who nursed my first wife and kept house at Burnt Quarter for a time after Mrs. Macie's death. I knew he was an editor, but I didn't know he was a lawyer."

"It seems he has been both," Brent answered. "He's been interested in the stand I've taken on Jim Crowism in the church and schools; and when you told me what my neighbors thought of doing I mentioned it as I was writing to him."

Reaching across the desk he possessed himself of Adriance's letter and read aloud.

"*Pollard's Code of Virginia*. Section 49. Colored persons and Indians defined: Every person having one-fourth or

ing a human being, but that they have been persecuting one of their own close kindred, and that even their own law assigns me to their ranks and makes me legally a white man."

"It isn't their law," said Macie, "it's one of the laws put through in Reconstruction times. It had gone out of my mind completely, but I begin to recall something about it. They'd repudiate it."

"Perhaps," Brent answered, "perhaps, but it seems they haven't repealed it. And so it remains the law."

He put Adriance's letter away carefully in an inner pocket, as though he were safeguarding the law itself.

"For myself," he began again, frowning slightly as he regarded the carpetbagger, "I am free to say I am prouder of the black blood in my veins, though it be less than one-eighth, than I am of the blood which I share with my white neighbors. I'd rather keep all such matters out of the courts; they could not fail to be humiliating to my wife and children; but I tell you plainly if it comes to an issue I stand ready, by the sworn testimony of the leading men of this locality, to prove that I am legally a white man according to the letter of this law. That's my position. And now I'd like to know what you advise. Will you notify my neighbors that I know of the existence of this law, and that I shall stand upon my rights, or shall we let them go ahead and leave it to them to prove just who my father and grandfather and my great-grandfather really were, in open court? The testimony would make interesting reading in the northern papers."

With a fine gesture Brent rested his case.

"I'd keep the matter out of court," Colonel Macie answered, with a conviction born of his own strong preference. "Granted that all you say is true, and I have no reason in the world to doubt it, you mustn't forget there's such a thing as lying like a gentleman, and whatever your neighbors may know there are certain things no power on earth will ever get them to admit, not even under oath. That's why I believe your position is stronger if you keep out of court. It won't be necessary to do more than call their attention to the law.

They'll be quick enough to make their own application. You know, Doctor, sometimes when you get a man on the run it isn't wise to run hard enough to catch him. It's likely to raise a new issue."

"Very well," Brent assented. "But Celia must be admitted to the white school. Let them understand that most distinctly."

In thinking the matter over after the carpetbagger left, Brent came to the conclusion that he could no longer depend upon Colonel Macie as an ally. He had served the lawyer's turn, he felt, in regard to young John Brent and his unfortunate mother, but it was evident that he did not wish to appear again as his champion in a court of law.

Probably Mrs. Macie's influence had something to do with her husband's cooler attitude, but chiefly, Brent thought, it was the lawyer's own unwillingness to commit himself further to an unpopular cause since there were no longer any vital interests of his own to serve by doing so.

The next day being Sunday, Brent could not take Celia to the school. On Monday, however, he accompanied her to the schoolhouse.

The door was locked. The building was tenantless.

Afterward he learned that Miss Page had resigned her post rather than receive his daughter as a pupil.

The school was not reopened, the poor whites refusing to permit their children to attend the school with Celia. Brent was powerless, as technically the school closed its doors and remained closed for want of both teacher and pupils.

CHAPTER XIX

EUGENE

After having failed to induce her husband to sell Comorn back to the Beverleys, Mrs. Brent made every effort to adapt herself to the new conditions of her life, and Brent, mollified by the verdict he had won in his suit against the vestry, and by the flattering attention of the papers at the North which made a leader and a hero of him, had arrived at a somewhat better state of mind, when the coming of Hortense again roused all the most combative elements of his nature and plunged the household into fresh agitation.

The girl's surpassing loveliness was a source of great pride to her father, and for a few days he believed that to her at least all doors would be open. Her beauty, her education, her accomplishments, in his opinion entitled her to the admiration of the community. But the recognition he coveted for her was not forthcoming.

She was never permitted the slightest opportunity to display her accomplishments or to win her way among the white people. The inexorable indifference of those she would have thought rather less than her equals stung her to the quick.

At home in Canada, at school in France, she had been received always as an equal, not infrequently, because of her rare beauty and attainments, as a superior, by the white people among whom her lot was cast. She did not share her father's awe of the names which had been great in his childhood, like her stepmother she saw only the poverty of those who dared to look down upon her, and she soon came to seek as eagerly as her father had sought for some weak point in their armor through which she could strike them with all her might.

From the first Joe Macie came openly to Comorn. Hortense had been inclined to value her conquest rather lightly and to chafe at his constant attendance, until she learned she had taken him away from the daughter of one of her father's enemies; as she chose to regard all those who had thwarted Brent's efforts to secure social recognition.

Joe's devotion gave her one weapon at least, and she used it to the best advantage. As often as possible when she was driving with the infatuated youth she contrived to pass the windows of Avalon. Mrs. Beckford and Polly soon ceased even to bow to Joe Macie.

That Polly was deeply hurt her mother knew, and Mrs. Beckford immediately cast about for a young man, eligible and unexceptionable, who might be brought forward to comfort Polly.

In her perplexity she thought first of Watt Beverley; but Watt, like all the Beverleys, would be difficult. She never doubted the sincerity of his regard for Polly, but there lurked a memory that she herself had not been blameless in breaking off his engagement to her daughter. If Polly made a brilliant marriage this would be forgotten. She put Watt out of her calculations except as a last resort. Then she thought of Douglas Hamilton, and her manner warmed to the young man when she encountered him at church.

Poor Polly! She knew she was not beautiful, and she was unaware that she possessed a charm even greater than beauty confers, if one less readily recognized and appreciated. Polly did not value herself for the sweetness and tenderness of her nature, for her sunny disposition, nor for the dignity and importance of her ancestors. That her father was almost certain, in due time, to become governor of Virginia, and to pass from Richmond to the Senate of the United States did not help Polly to a better estimate of herself. As her mother had told her a thousand times, "she had no proper pride."

There was about Joe Macie a certain slangy directness and a certain roughness which appealed to her as honesty, and he

was possessed of a measure of good looks and vitality which made him an agreeable companion, gay and amusing, and Polly had come to depend upon him far more than she would have admitted even to herself, when his sudden infatuation for Hortense Brent broke off their connection.

Doctor Brent was not at all flattered by Joe Macie's open devotion to his daughter. To him, the young man was the son of a carpetbagger, a Yankee, and there was not a poverty-stricken scion of any of the old families which had been great in the days of his youth, whose attentions to his daughter he would not have preferred. But as none of these offered he did not discourage Macie's visits to Hortense. At least the boy was white.

One day late in November as Brent and his family lingered over the luncheon table, the letters were brought in by Beecher Mably. Among them was an envelope which bore a Canadian stamp and postmark. There was also a photographer's thick envelope evidently containing a photograph. The former was addressed to Doctor Brent, the larger envelope to Hortense.

"Gene's in Canada," Brent said, addressing himself rather to his daughter than to his wife. "He says he's sick and tired of France and England and is never going back again. When he's through visiting his mother's relations he's coming down here to help me manage the farm." He paused, read on, frowned, looked up again. This time he addressed his wife directly.

"He's run through with every cent of money his mother and his great-aunt left him, and he wants me to send him enough money to pay some debts and get him down here. Gene seems to think I'm a millionaire."

"Gene looks as though he were one," Hortense said as she gazed with fond and admiring eyes upon the photograph she held in her hand. "Just look at him, father. Isn't he a prince?"

She leaned indolently across the table and gave the photograph to her father.

Brent took the picture in his hands and regarded it a long

while in silence. In his very different way Eugene was as handsome as his sister. There was not the slightest trace of negro blood apparent in his face. He had somewhat the look of a Frenchman or a Spaniard of a stalwart type. His eyes were fine, his brow broad and handsome, his nose Grecian, his chin strong but not heavy.

In the twist of his tie he wore a rather pronounced pin, a tiny parrot composed of many little turquoises and colored stones. It was a jewel of his mother's which his father had caused to be mounted as a scarf pin.

Brent passed the photograph to his wife.

"How very, very handsome Gene has grown," she said, glad to gratify her husband's pride in his son. "He looks quite the young Spanish grandee, doesn't he?"

Hortense gave a quick glance about the room. Jasmine Mamie had gone.

"And they'll call him a nigger if he comes down here," she said, speaking with suppressed vehemence, "and a white girl would sooner die than to speak to him as if he were her equal. Yet where is there a man among them who can compare with him? Father, I'll tell you what I wish he could do. I wish Gene could come down here and have a fair chance to show these insufferable people what he really is. I wish Gene could come as any white man might come, just on his own merits, and I wish he'd marry the proudest one of them all, in the oldest family they have, and then let them learn who he is. Your son, and my brother. It would almost pay for the insults they've put upon us." Her eyes blazed, her cheeks burned, her low voice was impassioned. "I wouldn't care what happened if we could humble these people, I hate them so," she cried.

"You've hit it, Hortense," her father answered, stirred by her passionate outburst, "you've hit it. Gene shan't come down here to be insulted as I've been. No, if he comes he shall have a white man's chance. We'll see whether he's their equal or not. They shan't brand him with the tar brush, as they call it. If they don't like the consequences it's no fault of

mine. If they are going to brand every man for his birth it's their own fault if some of them don't proclaim it. It's a common thing, I've heard, for men of mixed blood to cross the color line."

He paused, then smiled a bitter smile as he added: "I reckon this will just about get us even, eh, Hortense?"

"Just about, father," Hortense answered. "It would be a beginning, anyway."

Mrs. Brent had risen. She turned to the door as though to leave the room, then hesitated and turned back. She approached the table and leaned upon it, facing her husband impressively.

"Julius," she began earnestly, "Julius, you don't think of such a thing seriously?"

She waited for his reply with obvious anxiety.

"Yes, I do," he answered deliberately. "Why not? If there's any good reason against it I wish you'd point it out."

There was a smoldering defiance in his manner, the quick revival of the old feeling of resentment against her. It was not lost upon Mrs. Brent but she held her ground.

"There is every reason against it," she urged. "Our whole trouble here has grown out of the fact that you suppressed—" she hesitated. Once she had felt no shame in speaking of colored blood or of the negro race.

"The fact that I'm a nigger," he prompted her roughly. "I suppose that's what you mean."

"That the facts of your birth were not clearly made known in advance of your coming." She chose her words carefully, that they might give the least possible offense. "If those facts had been known from the first, much as some of your neighbors might have resented your ownership of this place they could only, without exception, have respected you for your great qualities and your success. They might never have admitted us to their intimacy, yet we should have known that we had their respect. We haven't that now. We came under false pretenses, so they believe. If in your case it has had such sad results, think what it might mean in your son's case.

Eugene is young. He is very handsome. He is brilliant and cultivated. There is little doubt he would make his way into the very oldest and proudest of these prejudiced families—" She broke off, hesitated.

"Well?" Brent asked. He was smiling coldly at her.

"You know what might happen, Julius. I implore you if your son does come let him come under his own name, and in his true colors. Don't let these people have any just cause to blame you."

"His true colors," murmured Hortense. "I suppose mama means waving a black flag and beating a tom-tom."

Mrs. Brent disregarded Hortense. She looked only at her husband.

"You don't seem to have any sympathy for any one but these neighbors of yours," Brent answered with irritation. "But then, of course, you're white yourself, and you see everything as they see it. I suppose if Gene came down here without wearing a placard about his neck with 'I'm a nigger' printed on it, you'd feel he was doing a great wrong to any white girl who looked at him."

He spoke with great rudeness. But Mrs. Brent stood firm. She had let matters drift before. Her bitter experience had taught her the folly of such drifting. She was determined to speak now.

"Yes," she said, "I should think just that. These people have their own ideas, prejudices they may be, but we have no right to deceive them on this point above all others. Julius," she added, "you simply must not think of such a thing."

"You can afford to say all this because you're white yourself," Brent persisted stubbornly. "You don't know, you don't feel the reproach that belongs to colored blood as we know it." He was becoming very angry. "That's why you champion these people."

"I am your wife, and I am Celia's mother," Mrs. Brent answered steadily.

"You can't say that you don't regret it," Brent cried, as he pushed back his chair and rose from the table.

Still Mrs. Brent stood firm.

"I can say that I never did for one moment regret it until you brought me to Virginia, where I never wished to come, and forced me to know these people whom I never wished to know. I have seen their attitude toward us, and I have seen how it is injuring and changing you. This is the one spot in the whole world where these troubles could have come upon us. And now if your son comes here under false pretenses I don't know where it will end."

But Brent would not hear her, and that afternoon, supported by Hortense's approval, he wrote his son to propose that he appear in the community as Eugene Raymond, that a fair test might be made of his theory of the fundamental equality of the races.

It was late that night before Hortense finished a long and closely written letter to her brother. She could, she felt, add certain arguments to those which her father's letter to Eugene contained.

CHAPTER XX

DOCTOR CARNIEL GOES TO RICHMOND

Immediately upon the conviction of John Brent, and the appointment of Colonel Macie as guardian of Miss Constance, Miss Bessie took up her abode at Brentwood. She went, ostensibly, to care for her cousin during John's absence, but she had other purposes which soon became manifest.

Colonel Macie and his son Joe nominally continued their residence at Burnt Quarter, but, as a matter of fact, the colonel resided chiefly at Brentwood to be near his wife.

The community was not left long in ignorance as to the real motives of this worthy pair. Miss Bessie's solicitude for her "poor afflicted cousin," as she now invariably alluded to Miss Constance, was soon merged in an even more anxious solicitude for her own safety.

"Yes, it's too bad," she said to any one who would listen to her, "poor afflicted Cousin Constance has changed so much it's not safe to be left alone in the house with her. Cousin Wilbur—Doctor Bibby, you know, he's no kin to me in the world, but married to my cousin Fanny, so I cousin him—Doctor Bibby says it's invariably some one like Cousin Constance, that every one calls harmless, who ends by setting fire to the house or killing the family while they're sleeping. And I'm sure he's right. I don't see how any one can blame us if we decide to have her put in an institution where she can't hurt herself or anybody else. If her son hadn't shot Gus Wyatt in a fit of temper he'd be here with his mother now, and I shouldn't have been compelled to apply to the court to have a guardian appointed. Whatever happens it's all owing to his recklessness. Of course his mother misses him, but that's

no fault of ours. We didn't send him to the penitentiary. Well, so long as my conscience is clear I don't care what anybody thinks or says. I've got my duty to do by poor afflicted Cousin Constance and I mean to do it."

Following this general line of argument it was soon decided that Miss Constance must be placed in confinement. Doctor E. Wilbur Bibby, having succeeded Doctor Carniel as Miss Constance's medical adviser, immediately upon Colonel Macie's appointment as guardian, was quoted by the Macies as their authority for such a course.

Doctor E. Wilbur Bibby was, as Mrs. Carniel had told her husband, of that indeterminate class known in Virginia as the "plain people," a fact of which he was uncomfortably conscious. In marrying a cousin of Miss Bessie's he had succeeded in allying himself with many of the best families in the state, and, having broken away from his own kindred, he was completely dominated by his wife, who, in her turn, was altogether under the influence of her cousin Mrs. Macie.

It was Doctor Bibby, voicing the opinion which Miss Bessie had taken care to instil into Mrs. Bibby's mind, who first proposed that Miss Constance should be removed from Brentwood to the asylum for the insane at Williamsburg.

At the time the application was received the asylum was overcrowded and no more inmates could be admitted.

Confronted by the impossibility of sending Miss Constance to Williamsburg, two courses only lay open to Colonel Macie and his wife; either to have the unhappy woman detained at the county jail, an alternative at that time not infrequently resorted to in cases of necessity, or to send her to a private institution until a vacancy should permit them to commit her to the state asylum.

In their dilemma the Macies decided on the latter course. The institution selected was located in the village of Low Lands at a distance of some fifteen miles from Brentwood, and was conducted by a man named Humie, whose father had been a physician of standing and repute.

"Doc Humie" had long abandoned all claims to similar

distinction and, marrying a woman of the poor white class, was content to subsist upon the scanty allowances the friends or relatives of the two or three unfortunate inmates of "The Home" sent him from month to month.

It was whispered about the county that Doc Humie had become addicted to the use of drugs, and there had even been talk of closing The Home, which was considered by many a disgrace to the community.

Miss Bessie favored the Humie Home because it was within driving distance of Brentwood, and she could "keep an eye on poor afflicted Cousin Constance."

"They'd better take care what they're doing," Doctor Carniel cried when he learned that Miss Constance was to be sent to Humie's. "I see now why Bessie Blackburn has been so busy drumming up my patients for that young fool Bibby. You were right, Matilda, she intended to use him all along for just this wicked business. Send Constance Brent to Humie's Home, will they! They might as well send her to the county jail and be done with it, if there's no vacancy at Williamsburg. She'd never live to see the spring. I reckon I've got to do something about this."

Doctor Carniel put his old horse into the shafts and drove off at an unusual pace to Brentwood, where he offered to take the entire charge of Miss Constance in his own house without any expense to Miss Bessie or her husband.

Colonel Macie and his wife declined Doctor Carniel's offer with considerable heat. Miss Bessie quoted Doctor E. Wilbur Bibby; she defended Doctor Humie and his Home, and she yielded not an inch to Doctor Carniel's alternate threats and entreaties.

In a towering rage, and now thoroughly alarmed, Doctor Carniel drove up the Neck and past his own door without a halt and so on to Lucky Hit, where, finding Major Blackburn at home, he repeated his protests, urging the major to assert his authority over his daughter and prevent what he termed "a cruel injustice and a damned outrage on public decency."

But Major Blackburn was, for the time at least, thoroughly

under his daughter's influence and, as far as Doctor Carniel could see, shared her prejudices, beliefs and convictions, and stood ready to support her in her purposes.

Doctor Carniel drove out of the gate at Lucky Hit and back to the Cross Roads with a heavy heart. John Brent in the penitentiary; Miss Constance an inmate of Humie's Home; it looked to him as though the end of everything had come. And for it all he blamed the newcomer at Comorn Hall, blamed J. C. Brent, and "cursed out" E. Wilbur Bibby to his heart's content.

Despite the bitter opposition of Doctor Carniel, in which he was strongly supported by Colonel Washington and many of his friends, the Macies persisted in their purpose, and on a cold raw day in early December, as the twilight was falling, a carriage, with its curtains closely drawn, was driven away from the door of Brentwood. The following day it was known far and wide that Miss Constance Brent had been safely installed as an inmate of Doctor Humie's private asylum, where, as Miss Bessie said, she could have every care and comfort suitable to her condition, and where she could not endanger her own life or the lives of others.

Soon after Miss Constance's departure from Brentwood Uncle Isaac and Aunt Jane were dismissed by Colonel Macie and retired to a cabin in the woods some miles from their old home, where they gave themselves up to despair. Aunt Jane wrung her hands, and Uncle Isaac went about half stunned and altogether bewildered.

When this state of affairs had been brought to pass, Doctor Carniel drove quietly across to a landing on the Rapahannock and took a steamer up to Fredericksburg. From Fredericksburg he proceeded by rail to Richmond. It was his purpose to see the governor of Virginia and to lay the case before him.

"Her son has been away from Brentwood just about two months, and see what's happened," urged the doctor, concluding his appeal. "If you keep him here until he serves his sentence out that's four months more. It's no use beating

about the bush. I've come down here to ask you to pardon John Brent and send him home."

And Doctor Carniel rested his case.

"Does her son know all these things that you've been telling me, that his mother has been sent to Humie's Home?" the governor asked.

"Yes," the doctor answered. "Yes, he knows. Mrs. Macie wrote to him about it herself. She said she considered it her duty. She had nothing to conceal from any one. That woman is as bold as brass and absolutely without feeling."

The governor shook his head.

"I don't like that. You said you'd been to Major Blackburn?"

"I went straight from his daughter's house to his," replied the doctor. "I don't know when anything has disheartened me like his unwillingness to see this matter in its true light. Blackburn is a fair man. He's stood for justice all his life. But you know how a man's womenfolks can twist him round their little fingers when they want to do it, and blindfold him into the bargain. Well, that's about the way it is with Major Blackburn, but he's the last man living I would have thought would wink at such proceedings."

The governor debated the matter in his own mind. Then he said slowly:

"The Macies have acted well within the law, the usual procedure has been followed. A regularly appointed commission found Miss Constance Brent insane, and the court appointed Colonel Macie her guardian. All perfectly correct. But every day I am more and more convinced that a legal right which is not also an ethical right may in fact be a very great wrong. This boy, John Brent, has rights, human and ethical rights, that seem to be lost sight of altogether. I'll tell you what I'll do. If John Brent keeps a clean prison record I'll pardon him in exactly four weeks from to-day. Tell him so from me."

It was with a lighter heart that Doctor Carniel made his way to the forbidding pile of buildings, where, in the warden's office, he at last saw John.

Anxiety and despair had left stern and deep marks upon John's face. His boyishness had vanished.

"I could endure it all," he said, "all of it, and the disgrace too, if it wasn't for my mother. Even you, Doctor, can't know what my absence has meant to her. And then to send her to a place like Humie's to be taken care of by strangers who may be harsh to her. My God! I don't know how she's going to live till I am free and we can get her away."

No, there was no further news from Montreal. The lawyer employed by Doctor Carniel had learned nothing that offered the slightest clue by which they could trace his mother's movements in the North or discover the identity of John's father. But the search was going on. Any day might bring the clue they needed.

"And then," said Doctor Carniel, shaking a clenched fist at the vacant air, "I'll settle with that nigger down at Comorn Hall."

But the doctor's time was shortening. So with an eye upon his old silver watch he talked on rapidly.

No, there was no news from the Neck to speak of. Nothing strange, as he put it. Everything was quiet at Comorn Hall. No one ever went there now except Joe Macie, who was to be seen openly driving about the country roads with Hortense Brent, Julius Cæsar's eldest daughter. Colonel Washington and Watt Beverley were talking of going into the lumber business when Julius Cæsar made the last payment on the Comorn property. Babes in the woods, babes in the woods. They'd lose the shirts off their backs if they didn't look out.

The doctor did not speak of Ada. A shadow on John's face warned him to avoid all mention of her name. There were some things which were best left to silence.

And then a glance at his watch told the doctor that his time was up.

There was a close clasping of a weather-beaten hand in a powerful young hand, a glimpse of kind blue eyes under shaggy brows blinking back their tears, and Doctor Carniel was gone.

CHAPTER XXI

A SIGNAL IN THE NIGHT

During Doctor Carniel's absence in Richmond a new figure appeared in the community. The newcomer explained himself by saying that he was an Englishman and that he had come to Virginia to prospect and have a look at the oyster industry before settling himself permanently. He threw a certain fine glamour over these bare details. His connections apparently were all persons of the first consequence.

Tide-Water Virginia is above all things a gentleman's country, and as Eugene Raymond came in the guise of an English gentleman of good family and antecedents, it welcomed him with open arms and at his own estimate.

The young man's knowledge of England and of English life was so evident, and so complete, his manners were so agreeable and charming, and he was himself so very strikingly handsome and attractive, that few who met him failed to come in some measure under the spell of his high spirits, his amiability and his altogether engaging personality, and he was at once received on an intimate footing in the best homes in the neighborhood.

It was evident that he had resources. His clothes were even more plentiful and more perfectly cut than Douglas Hamilton's; and Douglas Hamilton's father was a millionaire.

For a few days Raymond made his headquarters at Kinsale, where he had landed from the *Powhatan*, and was only seen in the neighborhood of Weyanoke occasionally. But it was not long until he fell in with Douglas Hamilton and Watt Beverley, to whom he attached himself, and before many weeks had passed he was easily induced to share the club house with them.

A great intimacy soon flourished between the young Eng-

lishman and the family at Piccadilly. The Washington boys received him heartily. Colonel Washington, who had shaken his head over Douglas Hamilton, welcomed Raymond with open arms. He was an Englishman, of his own race, his own kind. No bitter memories of a great civil war arose between his warm and hospitable heart and this newcomer. He received him like a son.

On his first Sunday at the club house Raymond accompanied Colonel Washington and the ladies of Piccadilly to the morning service at Weyanoke.

Doctor Brent looked once toward the Washington pew, and his eyes dwelt for a moment on the young stranger and then returned decorously to the richly bound prayer book in his hand. Mrs. Brent never permitted her eyes to wander in Raymond's direction. But his presence dominated her every thought; the service and the sermon were alike unheeded.

Celia was subdued. Her mother's somber mood seemed to cast its shadow over her; but Hortense stood with a certain proud defiance at her father's side.

Glancing from time to time to the familiar faces, Eugene was surprised to see them so changed. When he had last met his father, not many months before in England, they had discussed the purchase of Comorn Hall. They even spoke of the race problem and of the possibility that Doctor Brent and his family might not be cordially received in his old home.

But the problem, then remote even to Doctor Brent, was far remote to his son who had never encountered any of its aspects.

In Montreal Eugene's boyhood had been passed almost exclusively among his mother's people, the French Canadians, to whom race prejudice was unknown. Later at school in France and England his birth and parentage had never been questioned. He had always passed as white; his friends and associates had always been white. Not half a dozen of them knew that negro blood flowed in his veins; and to those who chanced to know it was a matter of a moment's wonder at the most.

Eugene had never sought to conceal the fact that his father had been born a slave, but it was all quite outside his own experience and interest. It was to him only a picturesque detail of the "Governor's" youth, a legend or a myth which in no way concerned him; and which was absolutely without personal significance.

Eugene was well aware that he was singularly gifted by nature. Highly educated, highly accomplished, he was sincerely devoted to his father and his sisters, and well disposed even toward his stepmother, though no special sympathy had ever existed between them. His whole life had been one of ease and success thus far. He could not conceive that it would ever be otherwise.

He had considered his father's summons to Virginia as an invitation to assume a leading part in an interesting adventure. He did not take it seriously. He was indeed beginning to find it rather irksome when his meeting with Hamilton and Watt Beverley enabled him to become an inmate of the club house.

Now as he saw his father and sisters in the old church, he realized for the first time that the conditions which he had regarded so lightly had taken a deeper hold upon them.

The genial light had gone out of his father's eyes; a smile still came and went or lurked about the lips, but it was the creature of intention not of heart.

Hortense too was changed; and Celia; but it was the face of his stepmother which told him most plainly how differently conditions weighed upon them. Instinctively he realized that Mrs. Brent averted her eyes from him because she disapproved of the part he had assumed to play.

Later in the day at the club house Raymond asked many questions about Doctor Brent and his family. Toward evening he made a pretense of having seen a flock of wild geese settle on an inlet which lay between Piccadilly and the Comorn line, to take his gun and go down to the shore. Hamilton, who knew Colonel Washington's prejudice against shooting on Sunday, attempted to dissuade him; but Eugene only laughed,

saying he didn't expect he'd get near enough to try a shot, and so slipped away into the closing dusk.

"You're crazy," Hamilton called after him. "Can't you see it's almost dark now. Come back or you're certain to get lost in the marshes."

Raymond made a gay rejoinder and passed quickly out of sight along the river path.

It was nearly two hours later that Doctor Brent, seated at his desk in the library at Comorn Hall, was startled by hearing a guarded whistle. The whistle was repeated.

He put down his book and listened.

The low whistle came again, repeated insistently from the night beyond his window.

Brent rose and took a step toward the door. As he did so the whistle sounded again, this time apparently close beneath the window.

He turned back, and slipping the catch, raised the sash cautiously and looked out. His eyes, unfamiliar with the darkness, could distinguish nothing.

"Gene," he whispered, "Gene, is that you?"

"Yes, it's Gene, Governor," his son's voice replied from the blackness. "Can't you let me in?"

"Hush," said Brent. "The servants have gone, I think. You go to the door while I make sure. Then I'll come and let you in." He lowered the window silently.

A moment later Eugene and his father stood regarding each other in the dimly lighted hall.

Despite his anxiety Brent embraced his son with real pride and affection. Brent loved his daughters, but even more he loved his splendid son. He saw himself in him; but a translated, a transcendent self, a self which justified all his ambitions, all his dreams. As he looked at Eugene he knew that he could not fail in the task which he had set him to perform. For a moment, a great pang filled his heart, a great regret that the gay, brave, gallant boy should be drawn into the murk and hazard of his fortunes.

"Gene," he said, his voice flooded with tenderness, "Gene,

maybe I was wrong to ask you to come down here on such a masquerade. Maybe I've made a big mistake. I've been swept into a vortex since I came back to Virginia. Maybe I had no right to ask you to make this test for me. If any harm should ever come to you—"

"Don't you worry about me, Governor," his son answered with his brilliant smile. "I'm beginning to see what a big game you're mixed up in, and I realize you're in pretty deep, and I'm going to help you to see it through."

"It is a big game," Brent admitted, "and it gets bigger and bigger every day. I know where it began," he added with a touch of weariness, "but I don't know where it will end. No man knows that."

"So much the better," said Eugene. "That makes it all the more exciting."

"It was reckless, your coming here to-night," Brent said, reverting to his first anxiety. "If any one saw you the whole thing would be known to-morrow. One breath of suspicion would ruin everything."

"Nobody saw me," Eugene assured him, "and if any one had, couldn't I have said I'd lost my way and stopped at the first light I came across to ask directions. That's plausible, isn't it? When I started out I took my gun. I told Hamilton I was going to look for a flock of wild geese that settled in an inlet up the cove. Couldn't I go farther than I meant to go, and get lost in the woods and have to wait till the moon rose to find my way back? Don't worry. I'll manage that. I had to come. I wanted to see you and I wanted to get some cold cash, too. I'm dead broke, Governor. Where's Hortense? Where's Celia? And where's mother? Aren't you going to let them know I'm here?"

"They're up-stairs, I reckon. Come into the library and I'll go up and tell them. You might as well understand in the beginning, Gene," he added, pausing in the doorway, "that mother is strongly opposed to your coming down here in this way. She's been against it from the first. She hates the place and she hates the people. If I had listened to her I

should have sold out and gone back to Canada long ago. Maybe she was right, maybe it would have been the wisest thing to do, but it's too late to think of running away now. I'm going to stay and fight it out no matter what comes of it, but I don't ask you and Hortense to sacrifice your lives for my convictions. But for my own part I want you to know I'm in the fight to stay."

"Then you'll find me right beside you, Governor, through thick and thin," Eugene responded warmly. "You know I don't give a hang for the race issue, if there really is such a thing, but I want to see you win out, Governor."

Brent took the hand his son extended.

"You're a good boy, Gene," he said with a strong surge of tenderness. "You always were a good son; no matter for your little faults. You'll be a great dependence to me, a great comfort and a help. I'm glad to have you here. Wait, and I'll call mother and Hortense."

"Good old governor," Eugene said as his father left the room. And then he thought: "But he's taking all this damned nonsense about the races too seriously."

Crossing the room to the great fireplace, he drew off his shooting gloves and warmed his strong shapely hands in the glow from the logs which smoldered on the andirons. Presently turning to survey the room his eyes appraised its beauty and its richness; his cultivated taste approved it. "At all events," he thought, "the governor isn't badly lodged."

And then, with a low cry of "Gene, Gene," Hortense was in his arms and clinging to him fondly.

"Oh, Gene, you'll help us fight them, won't you? Mother is determined you shall go back to Canada at once, but you won't go until you've helped us to humble and humiliate them as they have humbled and humiliated us? You can't dream of the cruel insults they have put on father."

"I've promised the governor I'm going to see this business through," her brother answered earnestly.

As he spoke Mrs. Brent entered the room.

"Eugene," she said, "I would be glad to see you here, thank-

ful to see you here, if you had only come under your true name, and as your father's son; but to come here to live among white people assuming that you are one of them—"

"But, Molly, be reasonable," her husband broke in with rising irritation. "Please don't forget in your advocacy of your neighbors' cause, that according to their own laws, laws still standing on their statute books, Eugene is legally a white man. So after all he isn't pretending to be anything but what he really is."

Her husband's tone rather than his argument caused Mrs. Brent to turn away with a gesture of despair.

"Of course, Governor, I'm white," Eugene said, smiling. "I'm white, if that means I'm just like everybody else. Oh, mother, don't you feel so badly about it. You're all taking things too seriously. I realized that the moment I saw you in church this morning. That's why I took chances on coming here to-night. It's all right to fight these people and win out. There's some sport in that. But there isn't any need to let it spoil your lives. The whole thing isn't worth it. There's a lot of fuss and talk about the race question in this part of the country; it's about all you do hear; but if you're just like everybody else, as we are, and even these rabid nigger-haters can't detect any difference, why, where is the difference? Of course there isn't any. There's one thing they may be certain of, and that is I don't admit there's any difference where I'm concerned. And they'll find I'll act accordingly. I don't want to marry. The Lord knows I haven't anything now but what the governor gives me, and that wouldn't be enough to keep me and to keep a wife; but if I did want to marry a white girl I'd feel perfectly free to do it, and I wouldn't feel I owed anybody any explanations either."

"I can not imagine any greater calamity than acting on such a theory," Mrs. Brent interposed. "It would mean certain ruin for every one involved. Certain ruin and utter misery."

"That's what you think," her husband said, his irritation deepening to resentment.

"It's what I know," Mrs. Brent replied.

Eugene shrugged his broad shoulders.

"If mother is so unhappy here, why don't you sell the place, Governor?" he asked. "With all this row on there's no fun for Hortense or Celia. I can't see myself exactly what you get out of it, but, of course, if you do stick it out things are bound to change and come your way. This feeling can't last even down here. Before long it will just be the old question of class. Caste, not race, determines social position. That's what it always is—class, not color. This thing you're fighting is only a prejudice. That's all. The pioneers who try to break it down are apt to have a very rough time of it, if they live south. Mother is perfectly right about that. But, in the end, it's going to be just as it is everywhere else in the world, a question of class and not a question of race. The only real reason for race prejudice now is that there never has been a race of colored men in America who were anything but slaves and serfs. But slavery has gone, and the old taint will go. We shall have our aristocrats, our patricians, and they'll marry into their own class regardless of the question of race or color. Race as race will cut less and less figure till in the end it cuts none at all. They're pretty mixed up already down here, though they don't admit it; pretty badly mixed up. And it's only begun. At least, that's as it all impresses me."

The moon was high when Eugene Raymond entered the club house. Watt Beverley and Douglas Hamilton were just debating the wisdom of setting out in search of him when his return allayed their anxiety. Hamilton had been certain that Eugene had lost himself in the woods, but would find his way out when the moon rose.

Eugene, finding his explanation already made for him, gave it his acquiescence and the young men went to bed.

CHAPTER XXII

HUMIE'S HOME

On the day appointed, Doctor Carniel was again in Richmond. The governor had fulfilled his promise, and John Brent was free.

"The first thing I want to do," John said as he made his way toward the railway station with the doctor, "is to go straight from Fredericksburg to Humie's place. We'll be in Fredericksburg before three. We can get a team there and drive across to Low Lands by seven or eight o'clock. If I find my mother very unhappy couldn't we take her away with us to-night?"

"No, John, I'm afraid we couldn't, not to-night," the doctor answered regretfully. "Not at least without Colonel Macie's consent, or the consent of the court."

"It's no use counting on the Macies for anything but opposition," John said gloomily. "Will it take long to secure her release through the court?"

"It may take time, John, but it can be done. You see we'll have to prove a great many things, which, while they are perfectly simple to us, are yet very difficult to establish before a court."

"You're leading up to something, Doctor?" John questioned.

"Yes, I am," his friend admitted. "It's this: the best asset we have in the fight we've got before us is just the inhuman conduct of Colonel Macie and your Cousin Bessie. They had no right on earth to send your mother to a place like Humie's."

John regarded the doctor with growing anxiety.

"You've seen my mother in the last few days?" he asked.

"Yes. I've been over there as often as I could, considering the distance and the weather and the roads. And Ada Beverley has gone just as often as we felt it safe to let her go. I've talked to Humie, and I've paid for extras. But they have only very poor accommodations. Their old buildings were burnt about a year ago, and the house they're in now is all run down to nothing, and things look pretty bare and bleak. Mrs. Humie is a sloven. And they've a half-witted daughter. Your mother should never have been sent there. You must be prepared for a change in her, John. She has aged and broken since you saw her last."

He stole a glance at the young man's face. It was rigid with mingled fear, anguish and fury.

"You are trying to prepare me for what I am going to find," he said. "Well, I'm out now and I've got my chance. They won't have it all their own way any longer."

"You've got to be careful, John," the doctor warned. "If you let your passion run away with you again there's no hope for your mother. You must act on sober judgment, not on impulse, now. If you keep cool we can do a great deal. Say what they will, they can't deny you are your mother's son. But if you lose your head we might as well give up; I'd almost regret that I asked the governor to pardon you."

"I'll do my best," John answered earnestly. "I'll endure anything before I'll put myself in a position where mother is left at the mercy of that man Macie and his wife. They haven't punished me, they've punished her."

Half an hour later they boarded the train for Fredericksburg, and soon the bright wintry landscape sped away, and sped away past the windows from which John looked as they rushed northward through the sunshine.

Arrived at Fredericksburg they went at once to a livery stable where the doctor was well known.

"Going across to Low Lands, are you, Doctor?" the proprietor asked genially. "Well, sir, I wisht like hell I could give you an' the young gentleman a sleigh, but they're all out. And anyways there's going to be a change in the weather. And if

she comes on to rain like I think it will, you'd cuss me out for giving you runners to set over instead of wheels. The roads is heavy down that-a-ways, so I hear, an' if the snow was to begin to melt I reckon you'd be up to the hubs in mud and slush before you see Weyanoke Cross Roads again. Keep the team right on home if you ain't able to do better. But if you can get a fix at Low Lands, or fall in with any party going your way, just send the team back by the driver. Send me a check when you know the damage. Why, hell, Doctor, I wouldn't take no deposit from a gentleman of your standing. I hear there's been big doings down your way. Anything new about that nigger doctor that's bought the old Beverley property? We hear he's a high liver; got a white wife and keeps his carriage. Now, say, did you ever know the beat of that? Why, gentlemen, if I was to see him driving along the road, and I was a gentleman of your standing, I'd drag him off the seat and then I'd proceed to kick the hell out of him. You gentlemen of standing take things too easy down Weyanoke way. At least, that's what I've heard said here in Fredericksburg."

"We've had our hands pretty full, sir," the doctor replied, glad to hear the wheels rapidly approaching from around the corner of the building. "But we may be able to give a better account of ourselves a little later."

There was a parting exchange of courtesies becoming the occasion and John and Doctor Carniel were off on the last stage of their journey to Low Lands and to Doctor Humie's Home.

It was long after dark when the horses plodded wearily into the straggling village. Leaving the driver and team at the house of an acquaintance, John and the doctor made their way on foot down the deserted street toward Doctor Humie's asylum, which stood at a little distance beyond the huddle of buildings that made up the village.

Only a narrow path had been broken through the snow of the night before. Doctor Carniel led the way. Here and there a cheerful light shone out from a window. But for the

most part the houses which they passed were dark and silent. The snow was beginning to fall again and with the night the cold had become intense.

At last they came to the house they sought. It stood gaunt and desolate in a bare yard about which a high fence had been built. Along the top of this fence strands of barbed wire were fastened to pointed pickets. Despite these evidences of the prison-like character of the place, the heavy gates stood open.

They entered and mounting the half-rotten timber steps, from which the snow had not been swept away, knocked upon the door.

A slatternly woman answered their summons. In her hand she carried a glass lamp. Seeing Doctor Carniel she admitted him with a familiar nod.

"Well, I declare, if it ain't Doctor Carniel come out again to see old Miss Constance. Well, you have chose a night," she added, glancing at the heavy sky and falling snow. "There has been some objections raised to your seeing her so often, but they ain't been made to me, so I reckon I needn't notice them. Doc Humie's away? Yes, he's away. He's been gone since forenoon. One of the patients up an' hopped the fence an' run last night, an' pap had to put out after him as soon as he'd milked an' done the chores. The hired man quit last week. Ain't it mean the way hired help always up an' leaves you in the midst of dear knows what? They ain't no feelings. Well, young man, and what may you want here?"

Mrs. Humie's last words were addressed in no very friendly tone to John, who had followed the doctor closely.

Doctor Carniel explained that his companion was Miss Constance's son, who had come with him to see his mother.

"Him," said Mrs. Humie, regarding John with mingled disfavor, suspicion and surprise. "I thought he was to prison." She set her lips and shook her head.

"I don't know as I done real right to shut him into the house. Seems to me I'd ought to 'a' shut him out. Doc Humie'll have words with me, I reckon, if he ever gets back with that blame fool runaway idjet. It's against the rules."

Then weakening as Doctor Carniel insisted: "Well, I don't know as I ought to gainsay you, Doctor. Governor pardinged him out, did he? Well, well, it's a mercy they can't parding crazy people out, too. The world's full of fools, an' more a-coming. You better rest your hats onto the hat-rack, an' then step into the parlor an' take chairs till I can fetch her down. Maggie! Maggie!" she screamed. "Bring a light an' put it in the parlor on the marble top. An' while you're a-doing it, see you don't set the house afire."

Then lowering her tone to a confidential whimper, Mrs. Humie whined on to the doctor:

"That child's been born and brought up with fools an' crazy people so long I tell her pap her mind's weak."

Once again Mrs. Humie lifted up her voice in supplication to the invisible and obdurate Maggie.

"Oh, you, Maggie Humie, do you hear me? Will you fetch that light here afore I skin you?"

There were some inarticulate murmurs from beyond the half-open door at the end of the passage. Mrs. Humie bent her head and listened.

"There," she said. "I thought that'd fetch her to her senses. She's reading a novel, an' she gets that fixed she don't heed nor hear. You look at her, Doctor, an' see if you don't say she's looking mean and puny. I tell her pap he's got to choose betwixt his idjits an' his onliest child. An' he's that triflin' an' shiftless an' no-account that I certainly do believe he'd rather keep his idjits. Maggie Humie! Are you asleep? Put down that filthy book this instant, or shall I come out there an' 'ten' to you?"

The inarticulate murmurs became articulate.

"Go 'long an' mind your business. Do you think I'm deaf? Ain't I a-coming as fast as I can? I lost one of my shoes."

"What you take your shoes off for?" Mrs. Humie demanded of the still invisible Maggie with increasing irritation.

"I got chilblains onto my feet, an' that crazy woman's shoes is too tight for me. I told you they was."

"Shut your mouth this minute an' do as I tell you!"

screamed Mrs. Humie. "You set the lamp on the marble top and hold your tongue till I get down-stairs or I'll take an 'ten' to you."

With these admonitions, and without waiting for any reply, Mrs. Humie clamped-clopped up the narrow and uncarpeted stairs to the bleak regions above as if anxious to close the profitless controversy before there were fresh revelations.

As the light disappeared above in the hands of Mrs. Humie the momentary gloom was dispelled by the appearance of the dutiful Maggie from the kitchen carrying a glass lamp, the flickering flame of which revealed her to the eyes of John Brent.

Maggie Humie was a tall, raw-boned, angular girl of sixteen, with thin flaxen hair, pale blue eyes, and a lowering brow. In her left hand she held the offending novel.

She made no demonstration whatever in favor of any previous acquaintance with Doctor Carniel, nor of any desire to renew such acquaintance, but pushed past him in the narrow hall and, entering the meanly-furnished parlor, placed the lamp upon the "marble top" and was about to resume her reading in a corner behind the stove when her wandering eyes chanced to observe John Brent. During the time he remained in the room her glance never once was withdrawn from his face.

"I can't get her down," Mrs. Humie said, putting her head in at the door, quite out of breath and flustered. "Maggie, you put up that miserable, senseless book and come and help me get her down. I prized her hands off the bed twicet, but she took an' caught a new holt every time. I do wisht to goodness I knowed when visitors was a-coming so's I could have Doc Humie here. You come with me this minute, Maggie."

Mrs. Humie turned in amazement. Doctor Carniel and John had left the room.

"Well, I declare to goodness!" Mrs. Humie exclaimed, staring vacantly at the door.

Then she rallied her forces.

"You-all better walk right back here," she called. "This

ain't permitted in the rules. Doctor Humie never hears to visitors going up-stairs. You-all better come back this very minute."

But they were gone. Listening, she could hear them moving on the bare boards overhead. As she turned to follow she felt a cold finger on her wrist.

"Who is he, maw?"

"What? Him? Oh, he's a nigger."

"That's a lie!" the girl answered, barring her mother's way. "Don't you lie to me about him! He ain't no nigger. He's a heap whiter than what we are. Don't you never call me again when company comes. Don't you dare to do it!"

She flung her book violently upon the floor and stamped.

"An' I got her shoes on, too," she cried. "An' she ain't got nothing onto her feet but pap's old worn-out socks, an' they don't match."

"Hush your mouth, you fool! We'll say she's been in bed all day, covered up."

"Covered up?" screamed the girl in wild defiance of her mother and in utter disregard of consequences. "You know you got her covers on your own bed. You know you have, 'cause pap was cold last night. I seen you strip them off her, didn't I?"

"How'd I know them two weak-minded old maids was a-coming yistidy?" whined Mrs. Humie, her voice bitter with futile anger. "I ain't called upon to read the future, am I? I couldn't get to Fredericksburg to trade such weather, an' I won't deal with Hopkins here, no, not if every idjit was to froze to death. Hopkins he overcharged me the last bill I bought, an' he knows he done it."

"What's she got onto her bed?" the girl demanded fiercely.

Mrs. Humie tried to remember.

"Why, she's got some coffee-sacking, an' an old pieced quilt, an' two horse-blankets. I reckon she's got two, unless your pap took one. He wouldn't have took them both. At least I ain't noticed. I ain't seen her since noon till now. I been so busy."

"Ain't she had no supper?" the girl asked.

"Supper? How you talk!" screamed Mrs. Humie, her spirit flaming with sudden exasperation. "I ain't had no supper myself, not to speak of. Only a sup of coffee an' a taste of ham. I ain't had a good meal's vittles in three days."

"I don't reckon she's had one since she got here."

"Don't you cheek me!" cried Mrs. Humie, giving her daughter a sound box on the ears. "I'll learn you to speak to your betters. If you liked the crazy thing so much why didn't you 'tend to her yourself? If—"

Mrs. Humie paused.

In the open doorway John Brent stood, his mother huddled in his arms. Her dress had once belonged to Maggie Humie and was scant, and pitiful to behold. Her face was wild and haggard and terror seemed imprinted upon it as with a brand. Her hands were soiled and purple with the cold. Her beautiful white hair was uncombed and stained. She clung to her son in abject dread of losing him.

"Leave the room," John said in a low voice of such intense passion that Mrs. Humie started and then quailed. "Leave this room and don't come back until I call you. And you," he said, addressing himself to the staring girl, "you go out to the kitchen and get something for my mother. She's starving. And if you ever expect her to go back to that room upstairs, make a fire there, and make a bed. Go, and for God's sake, get her something to eat as quickly as you can."

Mrs. Humie had recovered herself. Her spirit rose to meet the situation.

"Don't you stir a step, Maggie Humie," she cried to the girl, who had moved toward the door, her eyes still fixed upon John's face.

Then Mrs. Humie turned on Doctor Carniel.

"I'd like to know what right you got to bring this nigger jailbird to give his orders here. I'd like to know what right a nigger—"

But Mrs. Humie paused abruptly, for John Brent had turned on her a look so fierce and deadly she dared say no

more. She slunk from the room and felt safer when the door was closed between them.

Presently Doctor Carniel heard her retreating, weeping clamorously and calling out that she was a white lady and would allow no nigger jailbird to insult her into her own house. She also prophesied the speedy return of Doc Humie and that he would have the law onto them.

"Oh, shut your mouth, cry-baby," the daughter's voice comforted her. "If the law ever lays its claws onto you an' pap, you'll wisht you'd held your tongue."

Doctor Carniel followed Mrs. Humie and Maggie into the kitchen and closed the door after him.

In the cheerless parlor John carried his mother to the stove and sank down before it trying to warm her hands, trying to pet and soothe the terror from her face and from her words.

It was two o'clock that night before he left his mother. Doctor Carniel had at last brought Mrs. Humie to reason by threats of exposure and by gifts of money. A fire was kindled in Miss Constance's room.

The girl Maggie suddenly developed a capacity, and it was to her efforts that these results were chiefly due.

Early in the morning John and Doctor Carniel roused the overcharging Hopkins and purchased some warm clothing, blankets and rugs. Later they saw that Miss Constance had a good breakfast, which she ate eagerly with John sitting at her side.

When he had fortified her for his brief absence, and had enjoined upon the now attentive Maggie the care he expected from her, he set out with Doctor Carniel to drive to Brentwood.

Doctor Humie had not returned when they left the village, but Doctor Carniel had taken the precaution to leave a letter with Mrs. Humie couched in such threatening terms that he was confident Miss Constance would be well cared for until legal means could be found to free her from such custody.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ESCAPE FROM HUMIE'S

John's purpose was to see Colonel Macie. The law's delays, he thought, might thus be avoided. His mother's desperate need was so apparent to him that he did not believe the carpet-bagger would dare to refuse his demand for her immediate release.

Doctor Carniel, realizing how vital the hours were to Miss Constance, lent a half-hearted assent.

He regarded John with ill-concealed anxiety.

"You can depend upon yourself, John?" he asked anxiously. "It's right for you to give him this chance now that you've seen your mother. It's proper for you to recognize the right the court has given him. But it would ruin everything if you resort to any show of violence."

John smiled a wan grim smile.

"I'll remember. I'll be careful, Doctor. But when I think of the wrong they've done my mother and done me it seems, sometimes, as though everything was breaking up inside my head. My will, my self-control, everything goes down. I've just one impulse left."

"To kill," said the doctor.

"I suppose so," answered John.

"It's always that way that crime and madness lie," the doctor warned. "You've got to find a better way than that, John Brent. There's only one kind of anger that is safe," he added, smiling grimly in his turn. "My kind. That's righteous indignation. And I've even known that to be overcome—by other people."

"I've had my lesson," John answered. "Don't be afraid that I'll forget it."

When at last they reached the Cross Roads and the doctor's

gate it was decided that John should ask Jake Yutsy to drive him on to Brentwood while the fagged and weary horses that had brought them from Low Lands could be fed and rested before they began their homeward journey.

"You'll let me know what happens at Brentwood?" the doctor asked. "I've a good mind to go with you. But I reckon I'd better have a talk with Mr. Braxton. The Lord only knows what's come up in my absence. You're certain I can trust you, John?"

"You can trust me, Doctor," John answered. "I'll come straight back here and tell you just what happens."

A quarter of an hour later John was being driven down Brent's Neck toward the old house which was his home no longer.

"There's a nigger at Comorn, and now we've got a Yankee carpetbagger in Brentwood," he thought bitterly as he alighted from Jake Yutsy's buggy. He opened the door without knocking and passing across the hall confronted Colonel Macie and Miss Bessie, comfortably seated before a cheerful fire in the drawing-room.

A ghost could scarcely have startled the amiable pair more thoroughly.

"John Brent!" cried Miss Bessie, turning pale. "Why, what are you doing here? I thought you were in the penitentiary in Richmond."

"The governor pardoned me," John said. "I'm free, and I've come home."

At the word "home" involuntarily he looked about the room. The air seemed filled with the clamor of the tongues of memory. Each familiar object spoke to him of his mother and appealed to him against the usurpers who were so much at ease in the house from which they had driven her. But he made a great effort to crush back the rage which rose surging within him.

"The governor pardoned you," repeated Miss Bessie. Then she turned to her husband, her face ablaze with anger.

"So this is what took Doctor Carniel to Fredericksburg and

Richmond four weeks ago. Well, he'll discover he hasn't gained much by all this meddling."

"It seems to me," Colonel Macie began in a tone of injured righteousness.

Something in the carpetbagger's voice seemed suddenly to sweep away all John's resolution and restraint. With a furious gesture he strode forward.

"It seems to you!" he cried, bringing his clenched hand down upon the old grand piano with such violence that the bric-à-brac with which Miss Bessie had adorned it started into the air. "It seems to you, you utter hound and whelp! Don't you speak again till I address you, and then answer my questions and no more. By God, what are you doing in my mother's house, anyway? That's the first question I ought to ask you. You miserable sneak thief—you treacherous coward—"

He paused suddenly, walked to the window, stared out, seeing nothing but his mother's white hair where the white snow lay, seeing nothing but her frightened eyes in the blue blur of the sky, hearing nothing but the incoherent words of terror he had heard her speak the night before. Slowly the thought that he was flinging away her slender chance of freedom made him calm again. He turned from the window.

"I've been at Humie's; I've just come from there," he said, speaking in a level voice. "I've seen my mother, and I've come here to tell you both just how I found her. She was locked in a room where there hadn't been a fire all winter; the snow had sifted in about the crazy windows and was an inch deep in places on the bed. For covering she had a horse-blanket, an old quilt and some coffee-sacking. The mattress, what was left of it, was indescribably foul and filthy. Her hands were purple with the cold. Her own dress had been taken from her. She wore the dress of a half-grown girl, and on her feet were a pair of Humie's socks. Her hair—"

His voice broke and he put his hands before his eyes with a gesture of despair. Presently he recovered himself and went on steadily.

"You have sent her to a place so much worse than the prison where they sent me that there is no comparison between them. And you sit here and warm yourselves in her house, before her fire, while you leave her to freeze and starve and suffer there."

As he spoke he advanced to Colonel Macie, laying his shaking hand upon the carpetbagger's shoulder.

"Help me to get her away from there to-night if you don't want to kill her and to drive me mad."

"Don't you lay hands on me. Don't you threaten me!" the carpetbagger cried, retreating toward the door. "You can't come here threatening me."

"Can't I?" John asked, following a step. "Can't I? No," he added, stopping short. "I didn't come here to threaten you. I came to ask you to help me to get my mother out of that cursed hole to-night. Doctor Carniel will take her in, and I tell you I'll agree to almost anything, yes, to anything you ask, if you'll get her away from there. I promised her she should be free to-night. Will you help me?"

"Don't you say yes to anything he asks, Joseph. Don't you take his word for a single thing," Mrs. Macie urged. "I won't have Cousin Constance back here threatening our lives and burning the house down, and I won't have her at old Carniel's house, either. No. If she can't stay where she is until there is a vacancy in the state asylum at Williamsburg we'll have to see if there isn't some sanatorium up north where we can send her. Don't you let him force you into anything. He has no right coming into this house at all. How dare you," she cried, turning to John, malice and hate ringing in her voice and blazing in her eyes. "How dare you, you worthless nigger! You've disgraced and shamed us long enough. Leave the room instantly, and never set your foot inside my door again."

"Your door?" John repeated. "It's not your door while my mother lives. The law will tell you that. This is not my house nor yours. It is my mother's still."

He turned again to Colonel Macie.

"Will you help me?" he asked.

"I don't recognize you," the carpetbagger answered.

"That's all," said John and strode out of the room.

As he quitted the house his dogs came about him, leaping upon him and licking his hands in an ecstasy of delight. He fondled them and when he drove out at the gate they followed him.

"It's a good sign, I declare it is," said Mr. Yutsy, but John did not hear him.

When he reached Weyanoke Cross Roads John learned from Mrs. Carniel that her husband had driven over to Avalon to have a consultation with Judge Beckford, leaving word for John to wait for his return.

But John shook his head. There was one thing more he wished to do. Asking Mrs. Carniel to look after his dogs, lest they follow him or stray back to Brentwood, he sprang into Jake Yutsy's buggy.

"Where, now, Mr. John?" Jake Yutsy asked.

"Straight down the Neck to Comorn," said John.

The early winter twilight was closing in as they approached the shadowy pile of the old Hall. The snow lay heavy on the roof like a thick thatch, the trees rose from the ghostly lawns, black-trunked, bare-branched and wind-swept.

Telling Mr. Yutsy to drive to the stable for shelter and that he would find him there, John mounted the long flight of stone steps to the Great Door. There was a dim light burning in the hall. He knocked and waited with some impatience for the sound of steps within. Presently the door was opened by Hortense.

John asked if Doctor Brent was at home, and if he could see him for a moment on a matter of business.

"Who shall I say wishes to speak to my father?" Hortense asked in her low musical voice. "I'm afraid he's engaged just now."

"I can't wait," John answered peremptorily. "Tell him I've got a long drive before me, and it is dark now. I'm John Brent. He'll know who I am, and I think he'll see me."

"Mr. John Brent of Brentwood?" Hortense asked.

"Yes," said John.

The girl regarded him with a furtive interest, then crossed and tapped lightly upon the door of the library.

"Father," she called, "Mr. John Brent of Brentwood is here and wishes to speak to you at once."

A heavy step was heard within. The door was opened. Doctor Brent's head appeared.

"Who? What's that you say, Hortense?" he asked. "Who wishes to see me?"

"Mr. John Brent of Brentwood," the girl repeated, casting a smiling glance over her shoulder at John.

"It can't be," said her father. "He's in the state's penitentiary at Richmond."

As Doctor Brent spoke John Brent advanced.

"No, I'm not. I'm out. I'm here. And I've come over from Weyanoke Cross Roads to have a word with you."

"Come into the library," said Doctor Brent, leading the way.

When John had entered the room, Brent closed the door carefully. Then he turned to his unexpected visitor.

"What can I do for you?" he asked with admirable composure, as he seated himself at the writing table which was littered with papers, pamphlets and many books, all dealing with different phases of the great problem which interested him so much, the problem of the races.

He gathered his papers in his large fine hands, and sorted and arranged them as he spoke.

"Everything," said John, answering his question. "Or nothing." They regarded each other in silence for a moment. John, leaning forward slightly in his eagerness, was breathing hard. Doctor Brent sat with uplifted head regarding the younger man intently. John had but one idea, the fixed purpose which had brought him to Comorn Hall and into the presence of his enemy. Across the mind of the other flashed a thousand half-forgotten memories; shreds of old purposes,

shadows of old loyalties, dreams of the servitor; and mingling with these the newer purposes, the new dreams of the master; for he was, for the moment at least, absolute master of this young man's destiny.

Suddenly Brent realized that a great crisis confronted him.

"I will do anything for you which it is in my power to do," he heard himself saying in his most deliberate and impressive manner. His rich voice pleased his ear. He chose his words. "You know I have evinced a willingness to do so from the first. I wish to be your friend. I'm glad you've come to me at last."

As he spoke a great load lifted from his heart. He meant to be magnanimous. He meant to do the right, the splendid thing. His better nature rose to the noble youth before him. There were the ties of blood between them, close ties of which he was aware, which tugged strangely at his heart. There would be the harvest of the boy's gratitude and the good will of his white neighbors won at last. With a word he would drive the carpetbagger from the lands he had usurped, with a word he would restore Brentwood to Miss Constance, with a word he would remove the reproach from John Brent's name.

Then he heard, through his dream and through his vision, John Brent speaking slowly and deliberately.

"It's too late now to offer me your favor or your friendship. I want neither. It's for my mother's sake that I have come. Wait. Don't speak," he cried as Brent would have interposed. "I haven't finished yet. You were my grandfather's slave; born there across the cove at Brentwood. If it had not been for the war you would have been my mother's slave, you might even have belonged to me to-day. Once when you ran away and they captured you and brought you here to this house, my mother saved you from punishment. That's all true, isn't it? And then you come back to Virginia and find her with her mind clouded, unable to defend herself by one coherent word, and by your silence you seek to malign her and fix an infamy that is beyond all words upon her and upon me, her son. You let them send me to Richmond, and you let them send her

to Humie's, and for these months you hold your tongue while she is being tortured, persecuted, slowly starved, and I am nearly driven mad."

He struck his forehead with his open palm.

"What do they pay you for your silence? How have they bought it? Tell me my father's name, put me back at Brentwood, and I will pay you twice what Macie pays. You can have everything. I want my mother freed to-night."

He paused, baffled by something in the changing face before him; wiped his lips with his crumpled handkerchief; put the handkerchief blindly into his pocket, moistened his lips, then said, speaking more slowly:

"I'm all used up. I reckon I'm too much shaken to talk. I can't tell you anything you don't know or that you haven't known all along. Tell me who my father was and to-night I'll have my mother free. They'll make terms with me to save themselves. Remember, when I'm at Brentwood you can name your price. Twice what Macie offers—anything. All I've got, or ever will have, for my father's name."

He ceased speaking.

Brent slowly rose from his great chair, and for a moment the mulatto and the white man faced each other across the broad table.

"You want to know the truth?" Brent demanded.

"That's what I came to hear," John answered.

"You are my son," said Brent.

"You lie!" John cried in fierce denial.

It was only the thought that if he did not control himself he would do some deed of violence which would again deprive him of his liberty and leave his mother completely at the mercy of her enemies and his that prevented him from laying murderous hands upon the man who called himself his father.

As he turned to leave the room a low whistle came from the night outside the window. The whistle was repeated.

"Stop," Brent called, as he followed John into the hall.

"Stop. Let me speak to you."

John heard him but did not pause. A dozen steps brought him to the outer door. He opened it and came face to face with Eugene Raymond. For an instant the two young men regarded each other in surprise. Then Raymond spoke.

"Is Doctor Brent at home?" he asked, his easy nonchalance unruffled by the encounter. "As I came past the cabin near the gate an old colored woman called to me. Her granddaughter is very ill. She wants Doctor Brent to come as quickly as he can. I said I'd leave the message. I'm Eugene Raymond from the club house at Piccadilly."

John stood aside.

"Here's Doctor Brent," he said, and vanished in the darkness.

Brent's eyes searched the night after him.

"Go. Don't stop now," he whispered to his son. "That was John Brent. He's the last person in the world who should have seen you here."

"I think I threw him off the scent," laughed Eugene. "That is, if he doesn't stop to ask about Lorella."

"My soul, Mr. John!" Mr. Yutsy exclaimed as John climbed heavily into the buggy. "You don't look right. You look sick, you certainly do." And he drew the robe about John carefully.

"I am sick," John replied, raising his hand to his forehead. "Yes, I am sick, I reckon. But that doesn't matter. Nothing matters but my mother now."

"Hell," said Mr. Yutsy, "something ought to be did. Things ain't got no business worrying folks sick. Something ought to be did," he repeated and lapsed into a discouraged but not unsympathetic silence.

At the Cross Roads Doctor Carniel came quickly to the door as he heard the wheels of Mr. Yutsy's buggy stopping before his gate. At the same moment Mrs. Yutsy crossed the road with a lantern. By its light Doctor Carniel saw John's haggard face and knew that he had failed.

Thanking the Yutsys, John followed Doctor Carniel into the house, and while he ate the hasty supper which Mrs.

Carniel had prepared, listened attentively as the doctor outlined the plan of action advised by Judge Beckford.

The judge had promised to appear personally in behalf of John and his mother. There were legal formalities which would have to be gone through, and there might be some delay. But the doctor considered it a great triumph to have secured the active assistance of the most distinguished member of the bar in Northmoreland County.

It had been agreed at Avalon that John should return at once to Low Lands and remain there until his mother could be released.

On the whole, the outlook was brighter, said the doctor. Public sentiment was strongly on their side and feeling was running high against the Macies for their cruel treatment of Miss Constance.

When John had given his friends a brief account of all that had transpired at Brentwood and at Comorn Hall, he rose from the table, saying it was time for him to be on his way back to Low Lands.

He had promised his mother when he parted with her in the morning that he would return that night to set her free. He was eager to be off, and Doctor Carniel did not seek to detain him.

"You stay right there and be on hand when the time comes to serve the papers," said the doctor as he stood beside the wheel. "It may be to-morrow afternoon, or next day at the latest. I'll reach you by telephone if there is any trouble or delay. The fight will come afterward, but we'll win, and we'll break up Humie's place and run him out of the state into the bargain. It should have been done ten years ago, and would have been but for the curse and blight of Reconstruction times. The Yankees have a heap to answer for. We can trace most of our troubles back to them. Good to have some one to blame beside ourselves, ain't it?" he added cheerfully.

"It will be late when we get back to Humie's," John said to the driver as the horses plodded into the night.

"Yes, boss; I reckon so."

To John's growing impatience the drive seemed interminable. The horses plodded on. A thaw had set in and a soft, warm, misty rain was falling. The roads became heavier and heavier. The melting snow and mud clung to the wheels and hubs, making progress all but impossible.

The driver would have been glad to give up and stop for the night at some friendly farm-house along the way; but John overruled him and they went plodding on, plodding on, through the blackness and the dismal rain.

Dawn was breaking when they reached Low Lands. A light was burning in one of the rooms at the back of Humie's building. Making his way around the house John knocked at the kitchen door.

"Who's there?" a man's voice demanded from within.

"John Brent," John answered.

The door was opened cautiously a little way. A senile face appeared.

"I don't know you. You can't come in here at this time of the night or morning. What do you want round here anyway?"

"My mother's here," said John. "I've come back to see her. The roads were so heavy I couldn't get here before. She's expecting me."

"She is, is she?" the man asked. "Well, all I got to say is I wisht the mud'd been so deep you'd stuck fast in it the first time you came. You can't come in here now. I don't know you. I don't recognize you. You ain't her guardian. Go on out of my lot! If you want to know about her you got to bring me a written order from Colonel Macie, he's her legal guardian; or from the court. Go on out of my lot. I don't like your actions nohow."

"I won't leave till I see my mother," John answered. "I tell you she's expecting me. Don't keep me standing here."

"Well, I ain't keeping you. Ain't I told you you can't see her. Go on out of my lot or I'll set the dogs onto you."

"Like hell you will!" said John, placing his foot across the

threshold just in time to baffle Doctor Humie's attempt to shut the door in his face.

"Like hell I will," said Doctor Humie, pushing ineffectively upon the door while he glared at the intruder. "You take your foot away. Move on outen here or I'll learn you how to speak to white ladies and gentlemen. I'll have you warranted for what you done when you was here before. You can't come round here abusing my wife and insulting my institution when I'm to home. I wasn't bred up to take no back talk from a nigger."

"You'd better tell him the truth, pap," Maggie Humie's voice interposed from somewhere behind the hulking figure. "You can't make nothing by abusing him. He's a heap whiter than what you are."

"Shut your mouth!" Doctor Humie cried furiously. "If you open your head again I'll give you something to cry for," he threatened.

"I don't kear," the girl screamed. "If you touch me I'll hit you with the skillet. You better tell him. If I was him I'd hide you till you couldn't stand up. You ain't got no sense. You ain't never had none. No, you ain't."

She elevated her voice to carry above the noise of the scuffling at the threshold; for Doctor Humie was trying vainly to force John out and close the door that he might be free to turn his undivided attention to his rebellious daughter.

"Mister Brent," she called. "Oh, Mister Brent, your maw is gone. Yes, sir, she's gone. She cried and carried on when you didn't come last night like what you said you would, an' pap he took an' hit her to keep her quiet, an' she screeched, an' he up an' hit her again. An' she broke out the window an' she's gone."

"You struck my mother!" John cried, wrenching the lumbering form of Humie from the door. "You struck her!"

He shook the wretch till his teeth chattered and then releasing his hold on his shoulders struck him with such violence with his open palm that the man fell stunned and senseless in the pool of slush which the melting snow and water

from the rain spout had formed at the foot of the decaying steps.

"Where has my mother gone?" John asked of Maggie Humie, who had come to the open door.

"How should I know where she's gone? She's gone. That's all anybody knows. You better go after her. Pap he tried to track her, but the snow melted so's he couldn't. I reckon she'll go home if she can find the way. Get up!" she cried to her father. "Get up, you dirty skunk, an' tell the gentleman which way his maw went. Well, set there till you rot."

She raised her voice to follow and detain John's retreating figure.

"She's got her own shoes on. I put them onto her myself. An' she took the shawl you fetched her from the store yesterday morning. If she's drapped it you'll be sure to find it. An' if she ain't she'll keep warm now it's set in to thaw. I combed her hair my own self, an' I tied it with a ribbon. Do you hear what I'm a-saying, Mr. Brent?"

John called back something, some grudging word of thanks for this poor comfort. The girl leaned forward eagerly to catch the words, and then slunk back into the house as her father, cursing vehemently, slowly recovered his feet.

"Just tech me, an' I'll hit you with the skillet. Tech me, an' I'll knock you flat again."

John heard no more.

The little village and the neighborhood were soon aroused. Searching parties were organized. As the day advanced the news of the escape of Constance Brent from Humie's asylum was telephoned all over the Northern Neck, and to Fredericksburg and all the neighboring towns and villages.

And with the news went the terrible charge that Humie had struck the frail and defenseless woman. A wave of public sympathy swept over the country. Men turned out everywhere within a radius of more miles than the poor fugitive could possibly have traversed in the night.

John never paused to eat nor rest. Those who formed the little band who searched with him looked often at his set and

haggard face, shaking their heads ominously. The man had something in him that was terrible, and they told each other that the Honorable Gus Wyatt and Doc Humie had both been fortunate to escape from his hands so lightly.

All day long the search went on, yet by nightfall no trace of the fugitive had been discovered. The melting of the snow had obliterated all footprints. As the darkness fell the telephone exchanges were busy receiving the reports of the unsuccessful searching parties. The men came straggling in, worn out with the fatigue of tramping over muddy roads and sodden fields. The vast river, sheathed by the frost along its shores, and in its coves and bays, lay deep and broad and free beyond the gray stretches of the crumbling ice. Most of the searchers believed that the river had been Miss Constance's final refuge.

But John would not give up. With a few of the hardiest, and some late recruits, who brought fresh vigor and new hope, he continued the search all through the night.

Toward dawn he became separated from the others and a little after daybreak found himself making his way alone along a road near Brentwood. Certain that some instinct would guide his mother back to her old home, he turned in at the familiar gate.

His approach had evidently been observed for, as he neared the house, the door was opened and Doctor Carniel advanced to meet him.

John knew at once the search was ended and that the doctor had been summoned because his mother was within.

In a few words the doctor told the story. During the night the household at Brentwood had been awakened by a sense of something burning, and Colonel Macie, going down the stairs, soon traced the smoke to the kitchen.

There he found Miss Constance warming her hands at a fire she had kindled upon the top of the stove, which was blazing up nearly to the ceiling and filling the room with smoke. She had gained access to the house through the kitchen door, which, it was thought, must have been left unfastened.

She was wet, cold and utterly exhausted, but otherwise she seemed to have suffered no special ill effects from the terrible exposure which she had endured since her escape from Humie's. What might develop in the next few hours was another matter. Mrs. Macie had been called, and had got Miss Constance to bed in her old room, and then, thoroughly frightened, sent with all haste for both Doctor Carniel and Doctor Bibby.

Public feeling was so aroused that Colonel Macie and Miss Bessie dared not treat Miss Constance with any lack of consideration lest the servants carry the tale about the neighborhood. But upon one point they were determined. John Brent should not enter the house nor see his mother.

They insisted that Miss Constance's escape from Doctor Humie's asylum was the direct result of his visit. The fact that John had struck Doctor Humie had been telephoned about the country, and Miss Bessie had not been slow in spreading her own version of the violent and threatening language which he had used at Brentwood. However much the blow which Doctor Humie had received distressed the sensibilities of Colonel Macie and his wife, the general public regarded it with profound satisfaction.

Doctor Carniel told John that his mother was sleeping quietly as the result of an opiate he had administered. She could not be roused with safety for some hours to come.

"You take my buggy and go on up to the Cross Roads, John, and get a little rest," he urged. "Then when it's safe I'll get Macie to let you see your mother. I'll send up to the Cross Roads for you. Don't be discouraged. Your mother's out of Humie's hands. We've got the county with us. Things begin to look more hopeful."

"But they may try to send her back to the cursed place," said John.

"No, no, they wouldn't dare. Come, I'll help you put my horse into the shafts and start you up the road. Mrs. Carniel won't be sorry to see you, I can tell you that."

Yielding to the doctor's wishes, John was soon on his way to Weyanoke Cross Roads.

He was deadly tired. When he reached the doctor's gate he could scarcely explain that the horse was to be sent back to Brentwood. Even the few words that were needed to tell Mrs. Carniel of his mother's condition and the doctor's duties at Brentwood were difficult for him to articulate.

He stumbled into the house like a drunken man, unaware that Mrs. Yutsy and her husband, who had crossed the road as soon as they recognized the occupant of the buggy, had aided him. It was only Mrs. Carniel's strong hand which prevented him from stumbling on the narrow stairs.

There was a warm room above. Here Mrs. Carniel let John throw himself upon the bed and covered him with blankets. In a moment he was sleeping heavily.

As Mr. Yutsy led the doctor's horse away Mrs. Yutsy followed Mrs. Carniel into the kitchen, where she at once possessed herself of the broom as a partial justification of her presence.

"I sez to Jake, I sez, there don't seem to be no justice into the land like what there used to be, an' Jake he give me the strangest look and clamp his teeth shet tight, an' went right on about his business, an' never named a mortal word to me. Jake's took to his opinion, an' he'll keep to hit. Folks sez Doc Humie's got to go, an' I reckon he'll go quick."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE RESCUE

At dusk Doctor Carniel returned from Brentwood.

"Where's John Brent?" he asked his wife.

"He's asleep up-stairs in the sewing-room," Mrs. Carniel answered. "He's scarcely stirred since he lay down. You certainly aren't going to waken that boy. He's all outdone."

"I've got to wake him, Matilda," said the doctor, pausing on the stairs, "and I've got to be quick about it, too."

"What's the matter, Wash? His mother isn't"—she hesitated.

"No, not that. Her condition is very serious. But she's doing better than I dared to hope at first. The trouble is Macie's stolen a march upon us. He's got Humie to swear out a warrant for John's arrest for threatening and striking him, and they're coming after him to-night."

"Now, did you ever!" ejaculated Mrs. Carniel.

"The sheriff will be here in fifteen minutes. I got the word from Murphy Bird."

"The sheriff," cried Mrs. Carniel. "The sheriff coming here? Well, I declare I'm very apt to lose my patience presently. Indeed I am."

"You'd better hold on to what patience you have as long as you can, for mine is gone already," said her husband, pausing upon the landing where his wife had followed him. "The sheriff doesn't want to make the arrest, any more than I do, but he's got to do it. There's a heap more back of this than I have time to tell you now. Macie's planning to send Miss Constance to an asylum in the North, and he wants John well out of the way till it's all over. When I learned what

was on foot I went to them and told Macie and Miss Bessie that Miss Constance could never make the journey, and they actually had the face to tell me that I was merely prejudiced. They've got in that fool Bibby, and another man of the same caliber, to back them up, and they intend to send her away from Brentwood again."

He pushed open the door of the room where John was sleeping.

"They've tried to make me believe they won't, but I overheard enough to convince me they mean to send her to-night."

"To-night!" Mrs. Carniel repeated, aghast.

"They know there will be such an outcry about this whole business to-morrow that it's now or never with them. John," he cried, shaking John vigorously by his shoulder in his effort to rouse him from his heavy slumber, "John, do you hear me! You've got to get up. There's work to be done. John, do you understand me?"

John sat up on the edge of the bed and stared about him, dazed and bewildered.

"What's the matter? Is that you, Doctor? How is my mother now?"

"Don't worry about your mother, John, I'll tell you about her as we go. Put on your coat. Wrap up. Humie has sworn out a warrant for you, but it's Macie's work."

"A warrant," John repeated.

"Yes," said the doctor. "And if the sheriff hadn't been a friend to both of us, and hadn't got me word by Murphy Bird, they'd have served it, too. We've other work to do to-night, John, and we need you with us."

"What are you going to do? What other work, Wash?" his wife asked anxiously as she followed them down the stairs and to the kitchen door.

"Never you mind, Matilda," the doctor answered evasively. "You mayn't see me till morning; but don't you fret. Lock the doors and go to bed. If they're going to try old Reconstruction dodges in this part of Virginia these days, they've got to expect us to be reminiscent too."

Chuckling excitedly Doctor Carniel led the way toward the back fence, over which his astonished wife saw him leap with the agility of a boy, closely followed by John Brent.

A murmur of voices came from the darkness, then silence. Could it be, thought Mrs. Carniel, listening intently, that some one had been waiting out there for the doctor?

As she stood with the lamp raised above her head, looking into the blackness of the night which had swallowed her husband and John Brent, there came a sound of knocking on the street door.

"That's the sheriff now," she thought.

She closed the kitchen door and bolted it. Then passing through the dining-room she entered the narrow hall, and putting down the lamp upon a table, went to the front door and opened it wide.

In the light stood the familiar figure of the sheriff, come upon this unfamiliar errand.

"Good evening, Mrs. Carniel, ma'am. I suppose the doctor's at home," he began, and would have entered, but she barred the way with her comfortable bulk.

"No," she answered. "I'm sorry, but doctor isn't in. Anything I can put down on the slate for him so's he'll see it when he gets back?" She talked on, hoping to gain time for John. "Your wife ain't sick, I hope? There has been considerable complaining hereabouts."

"I'm sorry, ma'am," the sheriff said, coming to the point. "I'm real sorry to put you to any inconvenience, but I got a warrant here for John Brent, and I'm told he's in this house."

"Who told you so?" demanded Mrs. Carniel, taking the aggressive. "Bessie Blackburn and her precious Yankee, I suppose. I would thank people not to spy upon the doctor's house."

"Well, I've got a warrant for him," said the sheriff, evading the point with delicacy.

"Let me see that warrant this minute."

"Well, it's here," and producing a paper from an inside pocket, he held it out to her.

"Is that warrant regular?" demanded Mrs. Carniel, waving it away with disgust.

"I reckon so," said the sheriff.

"Don't you reckon so to me, sir, or you'll reckon with the doctor by an' by," cried the irate lady. "Is that warrant regular? Yes or no?"

"Yes," said the sheriff. "It's regular."

"Then you'd better search the house," said Mrs. Carniel, withdrawing her defenses and making room for the sheriff to enter.

"I'll take your word, ma'am," said the gallant officer. "Is John Brent here?"

"You'll take no word of mine this night," Mrs. Carniel declared with emphasis. "I'm called upon to answer no questions to please Bessie Blackburn. Search the house if you wish to know who is in it."

The sheriff turned to his deputy. "You'd better have a look about," he said.

As the deputy disappeared up the staircase the sheriff closed the door, shutting out the little crowd which had gathered at the steps, and drawing Mrs. Carniel into the darkened parlor, asked in a hoarse whisper:

"Have they gone?"

"Yes, I reckon so."

"Good," said the officer of the law. "Just you tell 'em to keep on a-going." He paused for a moment and then asked: "Which way did they go?"

"You'll learn nothing from me," and Mrs. Carniel's tone was not lacking in decision.

"I'd better know," the sheriff urged. "Since John Brent's gone I can follow any way I've a mind to think I've got a clue."

"Then you don't mean to arrest that boy?" Mrs. Carniel asked in an eager whisper. "Tell me the truth."

"I certainly don't, if I can any ways avoid it, but I got to make some show of trying. Shall I put out toward Brentwood or toward Comorn Hall and Piccadilly?"

Some blind instinct prompted Mrs. Carniel.

"If you take my advice you'll keep clear of Brentwood. Say he made off toward Warsaw and the doctor with him. Say he's going north after he gets a train at Fredericksburg to-morrow. And stop that man trapesing his muddy feet up and down my stairs."

"All right, Jim," the sheriff called. "Come down, we got to look sharp. I've reason to believe John Brent's off Warsaw way in a buggy. An' we got to get him before he reaches the county line."

In another moment the sheriff and his deputy had departed into the heavy night. When they were gone Mrs. Carniel sat down and wept. Then she arose, strengthened in spirit, wiped her eyes, put a shawl over her head, and hurried across the road to the blacksmith's house. Mrs. Yutsy was alone.

"No, Jake he ain't to home to-night," Mrs. Yutsy said in answer to Mrs. Carniel's question. "Somebody they come an' hollered to him, an' he up an' went to the door, an' then he must of went out into the road, for he shut the door behind him, an' I reckon it was as much as ten solid minutes, clock time, afore he come in again. Not that I so much as noticed the clock, but I was that vexed and put out to think he'd stay so long a-standing an' idling his time away into the public highroad, as you might say, that it must a took as much as ten minutes, clock time, for to get me wrought up like what I was a-getting. An' then Jake he come back an' sez he'd have to go over to Warsaw to a meeting of his lodge. Friendly Lodge Number Five, he sez, which couldn't be put off nohow. 'It's a good thing for your children I don't belong to no friendly orders,' I sez. An' he sez to me, 'Well, have it so.' An' then he took an' give me a hug till I thought my ribs was gone, an' off he went, paying no more attention to what I was a-saying than if I'd been a horse he was a-shoeing that looked round to ask why he was a-paring her hoof so clost."

"You don't reckon he could have gone with the sheriff's men to hunt for John Brent, do you?" Mrs. Carniel asked anxiously.

"My stars," said Mrs. Yutsy, "is they after Mr. John again? This is a wicked world, now ain't it? Well, I hope to goodness he's give them a good reason this time. I sez to Jake, I sez, 'It's a pity of pities he didn't do more'n he did the first time.' An' Jake sez if it'd 'a' been him they'd tried to dab with the tarbrush, when he knowed he was as white as fleece, he'd not 'a' stopped with Gus Wyatt over to Broken Banks. He'd 'a' gone right on with the good work. Yes, sir, he'd 'a' took a lean old Yankee sneak, an' a fat nigger quack doctor, too, clean off to kingdom come, or to the other place, he said."

"Then you don't think Jake's with the sheriff's men?"

"'Tain't likely. We've lived neighbors too long, Mis' Carniel, for Jake to cross the doctor. An' Jake's feelings is been with young Mr. John all through his trouble. An' long as I've known Jake I ain't knowed him once to go far ag'in' his feelings."

"He's always been a good neighbor, and a good friend to the doctor," Mrs. Carniel responded with warmth. "I know Doctor Carniel sets a heap of store by Mr. Yutsy. Who do you think it was that came for Mr. Yutsy?"

Even in the excitement of the moment the "Mr." was sweet to the woman's ears.

"I ain't thought," said Mrs. Yutsy. "It might 'a' been Murphy Bird by his voice when he hollered in. Yes, sir, I do believe it was. It had that tired sound into it that Murphy has. No," she paused to consider: "It couldn't of been him or Salvadorie'd 'a' run in for a piece."

"Maybe he left the child at home for once," Mrs. Carniel suggested.

"Land a mercy," cried Mrs. Yutsy, rising and instinctively going to the window. "You don't suspicion anything as bad as that's afoot this night? If it was Murphy Bird an' Salvadorie wasn't with him, then there's trouble into the air, that's sure and certain. That child'd never let his pap go out without him if he hadn't some mighty good reason. Look here, Mis' Carniel, look quick," Mrs. Yutsy called from her place

at the window. "Do you see out there, between my house an' the light in your window? What's them—ghosts?"

Mrs. Carniel ran to the window and peered out.

Crossing the bar of light which her own lamp made in the road were six masked figures on horseback headed toward Brentwood. The mounted men rode two abreast. They went slowly, without haste, or any sound of voices.

"White Caps," cried Mrs. Yutsy in terror. "I declare it's White Caps."

"No, more like the Ku Klux Klan," Mrs. Carniel whispered. "Don't look."

She drew Mrs. Yutsy back from the window and ran the shades down quickly. As the two women clung together the sound of the horses' tramping died away.

"Ain't it awful?" whispered the wife of the blacksmith under her breath.

"Ain't it grand?" said Mrs. Carniel in an unsteady voice. "It's grand. There's some justice left in the land if there ain't in the courts. I'm glad he's out."

"You don't mean—" gasped Mrs. Yutsy.

"Hush," said Mrs. Carniel firmly. "You got to forget about this. Your Jake's not at home to-night, remember that."

"My Jake," cried Mrs. Yutsy, "you don't mean—he's one of them?"

"He is, just as sure as you're standing there. Murphy Bird came for him. That's why he left Salvadorie at home."

"Yes, I reckon it must 'a' been. What do you reckon they're going to do?"

"They've got some business to attend to down the Neck toward Brentwood. They were headed that way."

"Toward Brentwood. So they was." Mrs. Yutsy turned to Mrs. Carniel, a gleam of understanding in her eyes. "I'm glad my Jake's out too, for he's with gentlemen, an' he's a-following his feelings."

At about the time the six masked horsemen passed through Weyanoke Cross Roads a covered spring wagon was driven

sharply up to the front door of Brentwood. Joe Macie held the lines. As the spring wagon came into position before the steps, Colonel Macie and Doctor E. Wilbur Bibby emerged from the house, half supporting, half carrying, a closely muffled figure between them. Miss Bessie followed them out into the night.

"Don't you be uneasy about her, Cousin Wilbur," she was saying. "I've known Cousin Constance to have much worse attacks than this. It's half shamming. Don't mind what she says. Put her in. And, Joe, don't you or the doctor leave your father until you get her north and settled in some institution where they can care for her better than we can. Put her right in. Put a shawl over her head and stop her noise. It's utterly out of the question to have her here another day."

While Miss Bessie spoke, her victim, prisoned between the two strong men, begged and plead to be left in her own home. Her terror was extreme. Her appeals, though incoherent, were most pitiful.

Doctor Bibby, now thoroughly alarmed and heartily ashamed of the part he had been led to play, hesitated and held back.

Seeing his hesitation, Miss Bessie put him aside and herself aided Colonel Macie to thrust Miss Constance between the lowered curtains and to force her down upon the back seat of the wagon. This accomplished, Doctor Bibby, reluctantly enough, followed Miss Constance in, taking his place beside her. Colonel Macie then buttoned the oilcloth curtains and mounted to the seat beside his son.

"I'll be back home in a day or two, Elizabeth," he said. "And I don't think John Brent will have any time to disturb you before I'm here again. What's that?"

He leaned down, and Miss Bessie whispered something in his ear.

"Oh, yes, I've got it. But there'll be no occasion to use it. Good-by. Take good care of yourself. Drive on, Joe. I'll be glad when we're ten miles beyond Weyanoke Cross Roads. Don't stop for anything or anybody."

The jar and swaying of the wagon, the sound of the horses' hoofs splashing through the mud and ice, together with the heavy grinding of the wheels, for a little time silenced Miss Constance's moaning.

Doctor Bibby tried to comfort and support her. His conscience smote him and he hated the father and son who sat callous and silent on the seat before him. He hated them for having betrayed him into an opinion which he now realized should never have been given, and which he had been compelled to maintain against the better judgment of Doctor Carniel.

He knew Miss Bessie had spread the report that it was upon his advice that Miss Constance had been sent to Humie's asylum. That in itself was enough to ruin him. And here he was still lending his countenance to a course which he knew to be without excuse.

He was recalled from his sullen and angry musings by the increasing restlessness of the patient at his side. Her moaning was ceaseless now, and he could feel her frail body trembling with fear as he attempted to support her.

Presently Miss Constance succeeded in releasing her hands from the wrappings and struggled feebly to escape from the doctor's hold. The wind blew long wisps of her white hair across his face. Doctor Bibby had never been more anxious, more exasperated or more humiliated in all his life.

Miss Constance's restlessness increasing, it soon became impossible for Doctor Bibby to control her. Seeing this, Joe Macie gave the lines to his father, and turning about in his seat, attempted to assist him in no gentle manner.

Doctor Bibby managed to get his fingers on Miss Constance's pulse. It had risen alarmingly.

"I tell you what it is, Colonel Macie," he said at last, yielding rather to his alarm than to his anger, "I can't stand this, and Miss Constance can't stand it. It's throwing her into a violent fever. She'll soon wear out the little strength she has left in trying to get away. If you'll take my advice you'll turn the horses and take her back to Brentwood as fast

as you can go. I won't be answerable for the result if you try to go on now."

His bitter exasperation tinged his voice. Doctor Bibby was perhaps a worm, but if so he had begun to turn.

"It seems to me you should have thought of this before." Colonel Macie spoke with strong displeasure. "We have brought her so far on your assurance that she could endure the journey, and that she would be better cared for in an asylum than she could be at Brentwood. We haven't made a single move in this whole matter without your advice and approval. I don't see that we can turn back now."

"I tell you," said Doctor Bibby, no longer making any effort to conceal his anger, "I tell you if you persist in going on to-night you'll kill her. If I made a mistake in saying I thought she could stand the journey, I'm willing to acknowledge it. But that's no reason why you should persist. I tell you she's wild. I can't hold her. You've got to go back."

"Not much," said Joe Macie with terse decision. "Here, Bibby, you get in front with father and I'll take your place back there. I can manage her."

"What will you do?" asked Doctor Bibby.

"Do? I'll tie her hands with my handkerchief, and I'll tie her to her seat if it's necessary. Come, move over here. We're not going back."

"No, sir," said the doctor. "If you're bound to go on you can do it. But you do it over my protest. I've warned you of the consequences. But while I'm in this wagon I'll keep this seat. And I'll not permit you to tie her hands."

"You won't?" growled young Macie.

"No, I won't," said Doctor Bibby.

"It seems to me," said Colonel Macie, "we'd better keep on. The mistake was the doctor's, and if he's been mistaken once what's to prevent his being mistaken again?"

"I protest," said Doctor Bibby, endeavoring to keep his voice from trembling with indignation and excitement.

"Oh, hell!" Joe Macie answered. "Go on, father. If Bibby

wants to play the old woman, let him. We're all in this thing too deep to quit now."

Silence followed this frank avowal. The horses plodded on. Presently Miss Constance's moaning recommenced. She renewed her efforts to escape from the wagon, and as she struggled she begged them piteously to take her home.

"My God, Bibby, can't you keep her still?" Joe Macie cried. "We'll have to tie something over her mouth to gag her when we pass the Cross Roads. If Doctor Carniel, the old fool, hears her, he'll come out and stop us and there'll be general hell to pay. Let me get in there. By God, Bibby, if you can't manage her I can, and I am going to do it, too. You've got to use force with a lunatic, as Doc Humie does. What's the matter, father? For God's sake where are you driving, anyhow?"

As he spoke the horses had veered suddenly from the road. Before Joe Macie could turn and seize the lines a powerful arm had dragged his father from the wagon. In another instant Joe himself was standing beside Colonel Macie in the muddy road with a relentless grip upon his collar.

No word was spoken. A man wearing a mask sprang into the vacant seat and took up the reins. Another masked man opened the curtains, and touching Doctor Bibby upon the arm, uttered two words:

"Come out."

Doctor Bibby complied with alacrity.

"If you gentlemen are friends of this lady's I'm glad to surrender my charge to you," he said.

There was no reply.

A masked figure, the same which had dragged Colonel Macie and his son so forcibly from their seats, now took Doctor Bibby's place beside Miss Constance. There was no delay. The wagon started on again at the same slow pace. Two masked and mounted figures, each leading a riderless horse, preceded the wagon, while two masked and mounted figures fell in at the rear of the little procession. As the latter passed

the three men shivering in the mud, one of the riders reined in his horse and, speaking in a feigned voice, said slowly:

"It's been a long time since we were out. But I don't reckon you've quite forgot us, Colonel Macie. Some ain't. You-all gwine on home now, and don't try to follow, or we may be tempted to give you the hanging you ought to have had some years ago. You'll hear where we've left your team to-morrow."

Slowly the wagon and its ghostly guard moved on and vanished in the darkness. The three men stood silent, waiting for the sounds to die away. Suddenly Joe Macie laughed aloud.

"What's the matter? Are we all asleep or drunk? That's John Brent stealing his mother away from us. Give me that revolver and I'll go after them. I've read about this sort of thing."

"Hush, hush!" Colonel Macie whispered, seizing his son by the arm, his hand shaking as if with palsy. "You've read about it, maybe, but I've seen it at its work. Stand still. Some of them may be hiding in the bushes. We've got to take care."

"What are you afraid of?" growled the son. But he did not move.

"You don't think—" whispered Doctor Bibby, his teeth chattering with cold and terror.

"They've got on their old masks. The very ones they used to wear. And they were musty. They smelled like death."

After that the silence was not broken until they cautiously turned toward Brentwood, retracing their steps through the inky blackness of the night.

In the covered wagon John Brent sat with his arms about his mother, comforting and soothing her as best he could.

Doctor Carniel was on the front seat driving, and his familiar voice aided to calm Miss Constance's terror. Two horse-men still rode before the covered wagon, two behind.

"Pleasant, seasonable times them was, Jake, wasn't they?"

drawled a slow soft voice. "Seems to me trouble gits friends together a heap surer than most any other thing. Take a marrying, take a burying, take a fire, or take a lynching, you're sure to see your old friends out. It don't seem to me as how I recollect the time I've had a talk to name a talk with Judge Beckford or Colonel Washington afore to-night in I can't tell when. Makes a body feel like a boy again, don't it?"

"Take keer how you keep a-naming names, Murphy. You can't be too keerful on an open road with niggers coming home from sociables and lodge meetings," Mr. Yutsy cautioned Mr. Bird.

"Niggers ain't no business on the road after day-down, nohow," declared Mr. Bird. "There's a heap more a body might set right if some gentleman of standing 'ud only take an' take the lead. We done real well to-night, but I can't say but what I'd 'a' liked it better if we'd 'a' done more. It didn't seem to me we finished off the way we ought to 'a' done. Neck stretching ain't what it used to be. I wisht," said Mr. Bird, after a silence of some duration, "I wisht Salvadorie could 'a' been fetched along. I reckon he'd enjoyed this a heap more'n most things. That child's old into his feelings. He could 'a' set right back of me an' held on round my stomach."

"A nice place for Salvadorie if we'd had trouble. You don't seem to have half sense about that child," said Mr. Yutsy.

The covered wagon with its attendant cavalcade had turned into a narrow wood road leading back into the "Terrapin Forest" which clothed the center of the ridge between the Rappahannock and the Potomac Rivers.

"They'll be safest, Jim, right here among their own people," one of the horsemen who rode in advance said to the horseman at his side in answer to a question. "They will be left in peace for a while at least, and we must see what's to be done."

It was almost daybreak when the little cavalcade halted

before a cabin in a clearing in the woods. Uncle Isaac and Aunt Jane stood in their open door to welcome their beloved Miss Constance. Behind them a bright fire blazed upon the open hearth; here at last warmth and comfort waited them.

CHAPTER XXV

A MEETING OF PROTEST

The next day Colonel Macie's team was found hitched in a fence corner near Weyanoke Cross Roads, and Murphy Bird, chancing to pass that way, volunteered to take it back to Brentwood.

"Ain't Mr. Macie no friends up this-a-way to carry them horses home?" queried the poor white. "A nice gentleman like I always thought Mr. Macie was might naturally of expected some of you gentlemen to treat him more neighborly. Step in, Salvadorie, an' your pap'll take you for the pleasure of a buggy ride."

"I reckon you don't get no dollar for this job, Murphy," a by-stander volunteered with a laugh. "Ain't that what Doc Brent paid you for carrying him home from the landing the day he come?"

"Doc Brent pay me? Why, gentlemen, he thanked me that pretty I couldn't of took a dollar off him for to save his life. I'd of druv him clean to Canada just for the pleasure of seeing him thar an' leaving him thar. No, sir, I ain't asking nothing of Mr. Macie but just good will an' natural gratitude like what I got from Doctor J. C. Brent."

"Then I don't reckon you'll be disappointed," said Jake Yuttsy, who had left his forge to fraternize with the little group of loungers that now surrounded Mr. Bird.

"No, sir, I don't reckon I will," Mr. Bird replied. "I was a-going to foot it down that-a-way for to see about cutting a few sticks of wood. A pore man don't get a chanct to buggy ride an' be neighborly to the same time every day into the year. Sit over, Salvadorie, an' make room for your pap to do a kindly action."

Miss Bessie had gone in rage and indignation to meet her father when he drove down to Brentwood on the evening following the rescue of Miss Constance. She was for invoking the law and seizing the person of her unfortunate cousin by force if need be. But Major Blackburn opposed her sternly.

"No," he said. "You've gone far enough as it is. I can't hold up my head when I meet my neighbors any more. You've made me feel like a Yankee or a nigger. I'm ashamed to see you in this house from which you've driven your own flesh and blood. Take my word for it, you've done enough mischief for the present."

"And you expect me to sit still and submit to an outrage like that, by White Caps?" cried Miss Bessie. "Well, I give you fair warning I'll not do it."

"Don't be absurd," said Major Blackburn, frowning at his daughter. "Those men were not White Caps. You know well enough what they were. If you don't your husband does. And I can tell you this: it isn't safe to trifle with public opinion any longer. The mere fact that those six men were out on an errand of mercy, for that's what it was, is like a call to arms to every man who followed that trade years ago. You're ranging yourself on the side of that damned nigger doctor at Comorn Hall, and the whole country is ranging itself on the other side. Oh! Bessie, Bessie, what's a little property to you? What's Brentwood to the good name and the standing you once had in this community? You've got the land and you've got the house, and you've got the bric-à-brac that you always wanted so much, and you're likely enough to keep them, though I'll tell you, for your own comfort, that I don't think if the truth were known you'd be left in possession here for twenty-four hours; that boy is as certainly his mother's legal heir as you are mine."

"You don't believe he is Julius Cæsar's son?" his daughter demanded incredulously.

"John Brent the son of that nigger at Comorn? No, I don't," cried the major.

"But Doctor Brent says he's his son," Miss Bessie persisted.

"Doctor Brent," the major repeated with scornful emphasis. "And you, a southern woman, a Virginian, would take the word of a negro for the dishonor of your own cousin, and the outlawry of her son. We didn't use to set such store upon a nigger's word when I was young."

Miss Bessie burst into tears, but her tears did not soften her father, who felt it was imperative that she should be aroused to a sense of her conduct and its probable results.

"You've been so anxious to carry your point and get hold of this house that you and your husband have worked right into the hands of that nigger at Comorn; you were afraid he could tell a different story if he wished. I think he could, and sooner or later I think he will. He won't hold such a trump card without itching to play it. He'll only wait till he thinks he sees his chance to play it to the best advantage. Meanwhile, the fellow's got you and your husband absolutely in his power, and through you he will probably end by bringing my head dishonored to the grave. What beside I don't see yet. But that man is like a splinter in a wound. We'll never have any peace down here while he remains at Comorn Hall. He may have the money, but he hasn't the right to live there. No nigger has. You may not know it, but you and your precious husband have taken sides for nigger equality and fraternity, and you must excuse me from coming to your house in the future while you persist in such an attitude. My interests are altogether with my white neighbors, wherever yours may be."

When Mrs. Macie saw her father drive away from Brentwood without in any way modifying this statement she was more alarmed than she had ever been in her whole life.

In her own way she adored her father, and she respected both his opinions and his prejudices; but yield she would not.

A feeling of venomous hatred against John Brent and his mother took possession of her nature. Come what might, she was resolved that Brentwood should never belong to them again.

Even if her father was right, if Doctor Brent did know

John was his mother's legal heir, it would be a most dangerous thing to admit such a knowledge after his months of silence. No proofs existed probably. If any did exist the worst which could happen was that Doctor Brent might demand a price for them.

No, the only thing was to see the business through to the bitter end, to concede nothing, and to let their success prove their vindication.

They must regain possession of Miss Constance, and get her away to some asylum in the North where Doctor Carniel could not see her and spread false reports of her treatment and condition.

Miss Bessie was revolving all these things in her mind when her husband entered and asked why the major had not remained for dinner. She told him all that he had said, and explained her own point of view and the necessity she conceived there was for speedy action.

Colonel Macie listened with acquiescence.

Meanwhile Miss Constance and John were enjoying a respite in Uncle Isaac's cabin in the woods. A bed had been placed in the principal room quite near the great open fireplace, and here Miss Constance lay watching the logs smoldering upon the hearth while John sat at her side holding her thin hand in his.

Her fever diminished, and there were hours when she seemed to derive a placid joy from the presence of her son and the familiar faces of Uncle Isaac and Aunt Jane. If anything could have counteracted the terrible effects of the abuse, starvation and neglect she had endured at Humie's, or the awful exposure of her flight, the presence of those she knew so well and loved so much would have accomplished her recovery.

Doctor Carniel entertained no hope that she would ever rally or regain the measure of strength which she had known before her son's arrest, but he was determined she should have some peaceful happy days, that her son should not remember her as the fear-haunted, terror-stricken creature

he had found at Humie's. He was determined John should have the comfort in his after life of knowing that his mother's last days were tranquil, and that she had lacked no service which love could render her.

For five days the truce continued: for five days Miss Constance was unmolested. Then Doctor Carniel learned that Colonel Macie proposed to assert his authority and remove her at all hazards from the cabin in the woods, and that he was prepared to invoke the law to aid him in his purpose. A consultation followed between the doctor and Colonel Washington. It was decided to call together the chief men of the community and lay the matter before them.

The meeting took place in the district schoolhouse which stood about a quarter of a mile from Weyanoke Cross Roads.

Colonel Washington took the chair. Watt Beverley had accompanied his uncle from Piccadilly with the two oldest Washington boys. Judge Beckford was present on the platform, the Reverend Mr. Braxton sat at Colonel Washington's right; Captain Fauntleroy was also present, as well as every man of consequence for miles around. Major Blackburn sat in an inconspicuous seat at one side of the little building. About the door there loitered a score or more of the poorer whites, among them Jake Yutay and Murphy Bird. Mr. Bird was, as usual, accompanied by the inevitable Salvadorie and the indefatigable Grandpa Bird. The sheriff also was present, but, as he assured all comers, not in his professional capacity.

"Go right ahead, gentlemen, and don't mind me," he kept repeating. "Law's law, I reckon, but feelings's feelings and my feelings ain't no different from those of any other gentleman present. Damned if they are!"

After the meeting had been called to order by Colonel Washington, Doctor Carniel, who sat on the colonel's left, leaned over and whispered a word in his ear. The chairman of the meeting nodded.

"You gentlemen come on inside and take seats," he said, addressing the poor whites who had grouped themselves about

the open door. "It's a cold day, and we'll want to shut that door presently, but we don't want to shut any men outside of it. This meeting is open to all. It was called together to get the sense of the entire community, which we think it is desirable should be expressed in the form of an appeal, or protest, to Colonel Macie of Burnt Quarter, as the legally appointed guardian of Constance Brent of Brentwood in this county."

Colonel Washington's eye chancing to light upon Grandpa Bird at the conclusion of his remarks, that worthy man felt called upon for some expression of approval and thereupon delivered himself of the one solemn word, "Amen."

At this moment the door was opened and the somewhat sheepish countenance of Doctor E. Wilbur Bibby appeared, followed by his person, which he deposited as quietly as possible in the seat nearest the door.

Many eyed the newcomer askance, glancing from him to Major Blackburn, who, apparently absorbed in his own gloomy thoughts, paid no heed to the entrance of the young physician. It was felt by all that Doctor Bibby and the major were present as representatives of Colonel Macie and Miss Bessie.

Many were sincerely sorry to see Major Blackburn placed in such a light. As for Doctor Bibby, even the poor whites edged away from his vicinity, though he had unconsciously seated himself quite near the wood stove, that universal magnet of the chilly southerner.

The drama of Doctor Bibby's entrance having seeped into the souls of all present, during the solemn pause permitted by the chairman for the especial purpose of allowing the unfortunate professional gentleman to know exactly how he was regarded, the meeting proceeded to business.

Briefly Colonel Washington reviewed the history of Constance Brent; he then called upon Judge Beckford to explain the legal aspects of the case, which by many were not clearly understood.

Judge Beckford rose. He spoke of Miss Constance as his distant kinswoman; he spoke of her father, and of the eminent

position the Brents of Brentwood had always held, from the founding of the colony to the founding of the nation, and from the founding of the nation to the present day. There was no family in Virginia more honorable, he said, none more highly honored. If the whole truth were ever known he was convinced that Constance Brent, by the charm of her girlhood, the nobility of her young womanhood, and the pathos of her after years, would add a new beauty, if not a new luster, to the ancient name. He was certain she was as incapable of bringing the slightest cloud upon the honor of her family as she had ever been of the least unkindness. The mystery which enveloped her was deep. In time to come, he felt, it would be lifted and the truth made plain.

But it was scarcely to be hoped, he continued, that this relief could come in her own lifetime. Under the strain of recent events her health, already frail, had broken utterly. She had been, as they all knew, subjected to cruel and unnecessary hardships from which her ample means and her appealing helplessness should have saved her.

The legal aspects of the case, he said, were curious. Doctor Brent's will provided that all his property should go to his only child for her life, and that after her death it should pass to her children, if any children, born in lawful wedlock, should survive her; an old clause still retained in many Virginian wills; a relic of colonial times, when the laws of primogeniture were still in force, and when illegitimate claimants and spurious heirs were as familiar to the courts as they now were to the readers of Sir Walter Scott's immortal romances. Failing an heir born to his daughter in lawful wedlock, the terms of the old doctor's will were such that the entire estate of which he died possessed would pass, upon the death of Constance Brent, to her cousin, Elizabeth Blackburn, the only child of the testator's sister, now known to them all as Mrs. Joseph Macie.

At the mention of his daughter's name, Major Blackburn cast one glance toward the speaker and then riveted his at-

tention upon his hands, which rested on his knees cased in their heavy driving gloves.

The judge went on: The deplorable attack which John Brent had made upon the Honorable Augustus Wyatt, the brilliant and gifted editor of the *Rappahannock Oyster Shell*, whose absence from their meeting he regretted to observe, whether justifiable in the opinion of his hearers or otherwise, removed him from the community at a moment most critical for his mother. A woman, the mistress of a large landed estate, was suddenly deprived of her natural, if not her legal, protector. It was perhaps to be expected that when this situation arose, her cousin, Mrs. Macie, acting through her husband, should take legal means to acquire the control of the person and property of her relative, in which she herself had so definite an interest.

So far as the legality of the Macies' course was concerned Judge Beckford had nothing whatever to say. He gathered that this meeting had not been called to weigh that aspect of the case. It was the humanity, the larger ethical consideration involved, which they had come together to discuss. He had, he believed, explained to them how it happened that Constance Brent came to be under the control of Colonel Macie both as respected her person and estate. He would leave it to others better qualified to speak, to show them how this power, delegated by the courts, had been abused.

"Talk about it," said Grandpa Bird with fervor. "Talk about it."

As Judge Beckford resumed his seat Colonel Washington called upon Doctor Carniel to tell them what he knew of the case, asking him particularly to give them his professional opinion, on his honor as a gentleman, regarding the safety of removing Constance Brent from the care and custody of her son to any asylum or institution for the insane; this he understood being Colonel Macie's fixed and avowed purpose.

Doctor Carniel then arose and expressed his solemn conviction that in the condition in which Miss Constance lay it

would be most dangerous to remove her from the care of the son she loved, and of the two faithful servants she had known from her childhood, to any asylum or retreat whatever.

Her life, he said, hung upon a thread, and while he wished to speak with moderation, and with all justice, and while all must allow, as Judge Beckford had so ably pointed out, that Colonel Macie had thus far acted within his legal rights, he felt the matter, being one of the life or death of an old friend and relative, concerned them all very nearly and that, in view of the peculiar circumstances surrounding the legal aspects of the case, he felt sure that the sense of the whole community would be that Constance Brent should—he paused—and must be left in the undisputed care and custody of her loyal and devoted son.

Other physicians, Doctor Carniel continued, with a cold glance in the general direction of E. Wilbur Bibby, had been brought in who, unfamiliar with the patient, had been led to other conclusions; but as the family physician of the lady in question he felt that no one, however high a place he might hold in his profession, was in so good a position to pass upon the case as he. He should, he said, regard it as little short of murder, if Constance Brent were again molested.

"Amen," said Grandpa Bird.

As Doctor Carniel resumed his seat Doctor Bibby rose. He was very pale, and suffered from great embarrassment, but his voice, though low, was plainly audible to all within the little building.

"I agree with every word Doctor Carniel has spoken in regard to the condition of Constance Brent and the danger of exciting or disturbing her at this time," he said, and then resumed his seat.

"Well, I declare!" said Grandpa Bird. "I do declare!"

There was a moment's pause, and then Major Blackburn stood up to address the meeting. Ordinarily a florid man, his face was now as white as death.

He thanked his old friends and neighbors and, with a stately bow, particularly Colonel Washington and Doctor Car-

niel, for having asked him to be present at this meeting. It was an expression of confidence, he felt, confidence in him, confidence that he would not permit private feeling to override his sense of public duty.

As he spoke his voice, which had at first been low and husky, cleared and gained in volume. His head lifted and for the first time he glanced freely about, no longer shunning the eyes turned toward him.

He was, he said, most heartily in sympathy with the motives which had prompted Colonel Washington and Doctor Carniel to call them together. He could not too heartily endorse the words of the gentleman who now occupied the chair, who enjoyed to the utmost the confidence and respect of the community; or the words of his old friend, Judge Mason Beckford; or the words of Doctor Carniel, whose good works had made him beloved by all, rich and poor. When Doctor Carniel made a statement on his honor as a gentleman, he, for one, accepted it as proved and final.

For his own part he earnestly hoped that no mere quibble of the law should be permitted to cloak any man's unholy purposes. He had held his peace hitherto; but from this hour forth he gave notice to all that no feelings of a personal nature should blind him to a crying shame, or persuade him to walk apart from the friends of his boyhood, from his comrades in arms, when they kept to the straight path they had traveled so long, the path of rectitude and honor. He was unwilling to depart from his old friends, and from that path, in his declining years.

Drawing himself to his full height he moved a vote of censure against those who were responsible for the outrage that had been committed upon the helpless child of an old friend, and for the most gross injustice which, to the best of his belief, had been put upon her son. He wished his hearers to know that, for his part, he absolutely repudiated all belief in the malicious rumors which had been diligently circulated to ruin John Brent's standing in the community and to defame his mother.

The excitement and relief which followed Major Blackburn's speech were all the greater because many had doubted the stand which he would take. The tears streamed down his face as one old friend after another made his way to him and shook his hand.

In the midst of the excitement Judge Beckford rose and moved that a committee be appointed to draft resolutions embracing the sense of the meeting, and that all those present should then proceed to Brentwood to deliver the said resolutions to Colonel Macie.

"An' I second the motion," cried Grandpa Bird from his station near the stove, to the intense consternation of his son Murphy. "I second the motion, an' I'm ag'in' every man that's ag'in' hit."

Judge Beckford bent his head and regarded Grandpa Bird from over his spectacles for a long and awful moment, while Murphy Bird's soul trembled within him. Then Judge Beckford bowed solemnly to Grandpa Bird.

"Mr. Archibald Bird seconds the motion," he said, and balm of Gilead flowed in upon the soul of Mr. Bird.

"You done real well, gran'pap," Mr. Bird whispered in the patriarch's ear. "You couldn't 'a' done it no nobler if you'd 'a' been to Congress."

"Hell-fire an' brimstone," said Grandpa Bird, greatly elated by his success, "I reckon I can drap a word as well as I can drap corn. I done done it afore I knowed I was a-going for to done do hit, I declare I did. It comes natural to a body if she comes at all."

The resolutions were straightway drawn up by Colonel Washington and Judge Beckford, Watt Beverley, acting as secretary, writing them out in a clear hand. When Watt had completed his task, Colonel Washington read the resolutions aloud, after which all who were present and cared to do so were invited to come forward and sign their names to the paper.

Colonel Washington signed first, then Judge Beckford, then Doctor Carniel, then Major Blackburn, then Mr. Braxton.

"Gwine on up, gran'pap, an' take an' make your mark to what you seconded, an' me an' Salvadorie'll make ours. That's languidge that any gentleman'd be proud to make his mark under if he couldn't 'a' toothed it out himself, 'deed if it ain't. Gwine on up an' take an' make your turkey track."

Thus adjured Grandpa Bird advanced alertly to the platform with all the confidence he could muster. Every eye was upon him. Judge Beckford silently held out the pen.

"Whichomdever way do you go for to take hold of this here pen, Judge?" the patriarch asked as he extended his weather-beaten hand to clutch the instrument. "I'm able for to swing an ax as well as the next, but I ain't no hand for to swing a pen. Whar's the place, Judge? Just put your finger thar, an' I'll make my turkey track right thar. Thar!" he said complacently as he surrendered the pen to his son, "thar, Murphy, you do like your pap done an' I reckon it'll be good for your rheumatics."

It was a proud day for Grandpa Bird and his little eyes were bright with pride and pleasure. Murphy took the pen shyly.

"Evening, gentlemen," he said deprecatingly, "me an' Salvadorie an' gran'pap was just a-passing an' stopped for to hear the speaking. I always did set a heap of store by public speaking if there was a place handy to set convenient where I could ease my spine. My back ails me so lately I can't stand much, but I'd 'a' went further, an' 'a' stood longer, yes, sir, just as long as any of you gentlemen would of went on talking like the way you done. I was some disappointed that no gentleman had the heart to curse out that nigger doctor at Comorn Hall like what he ought to be cursed out. But I don't complain none. No, sir, I don't complain. I ain't a-putting my own mark just," he added in a gentle undertone. "No, sir, I'm a-making this here mark for Salvadorie, an' for all our family, an' I got nigh onto twenty cousins an' such, in this part of the country, all capable of bearing arms an' voting under the good old Granddaddy Clause."

After Mr. Bird came all the others scrawling their names or

making their marks until the paper was covered with signatures, or "turkey tracks" as Grandpa Bird had styled the rude crosses made by the poor whites beside the names Watt Beverley wrote out for them.

When this task had been accomplished the schoolhouse was speedily emptied. Then the procession formed and moved down the wintry road toward Brentwood. Colonel Washington's chariot led the way, with Major Blackburn seated beside the master of Piccadilly. Then came the handsome team and carriage from Avalon in which Judge Beckford rode with Mr. Braxton. Behind them came Doctor Carniel's weather-worn old buggy, and in its wake came men in buggies, men in wagons, men on foot and men on horseback. All descriptions of horses and harness lent their touches of pride or pathos to the long dwindling line.

A mile from the Cross Roads Colonel Washington, leading the way, met Joe Macie in a smart new buggy, driving John Brent's favorite horse. In the buggy with young Macie was Hortense Brent, wrapped in her rich Canadian furs.

Joe had drawn out of the road to let the men and vehicles go by. At first he thought it was a funeral. Not one man in the entire length of the procession took any notice of the carpetbagger's son nor of the girl seated at his side.

For the first time in her brief acquaintance with them, something in these Virginians awed Hortense into silence. She felt chilled and afraid. Yet a certain admiration mingled with her fear. These men who were not impressive in their shabby clothes when seen in church or about their daily routine of plantation life wore now a different aspect.

She imagined that more than one among them had ridden at the head of men in battle, that more than one of those who followed now on foot had followed these very leaders in a sterner time. After the procession had passed and he had regained the road Joe said to her:

"I'll get you home as quick as I can, and then I'll go back to Brentwood and see what's up."

"You think those men are going to Brentwood?" she asked.

"That's where they're headed for. No doubt about it. I'd like to see the old man when he sees them coming. He'll have a chill."

"Why don't you turn now and follow them to Brentwood?" Hortense asked.

"It wouldn't be safe, with you in here," he said.

"I'm not afraid," the girl replied, setting her lips. "I'd like to go."

"No," he said, "it wouldn't do."

"You mean they might be insulting to me?" she asked.

"No. They wouldn't insult you; but they'd act just as if you weren't there at all. It mightn't be pleasant."

"You mean because they call me a nigger."

"You shouldn't use that word."

"Every one does."

"It doesn't apply to you."

"Do you believe in negro equality?" she asked suddenly.

"I believe in you," he answered gaily, "and that's enough for me."

Arrived at the gate of Brentwood the procession drew up in compact order and so approached the group of old brick buildings which now stood stark and snow-covered amid the gaunt house-trees. The solemn crunch, crunch of many wheels and many feet upon the frozen ground was heard within the walls of Brentwood. Mrs. Macie hurried to the window. Colonel Macie, in his slippers, followed her. The procession halted before the house.

Colonel Washington and Major Blackburn left their carriage.

"Here, Murphy, take the lines," the colonel said to the poor white who had paused beside the wheel. "We all know that you can manage horses when you want to."

The happy allusion raised a laugh.

Judge Beckford and Doctor Carniel joined Colonel Washington and Major Blackburn on the steps. The door was opened and Colonel Macie appeared, with Mrs. Macie close behind him.

"I've been married too long to anticipate a belling, gentlemen," began the carpetbagger.

"Sir," said Colonel Washington with icy dignity, "I have the honor to be the spokesman of a committee of the Citizens of Northmoreland County, and I am appointed by them, sir, to inform you that your recent conduct has been the subject of much concern to this community, and I now, sir, in the name of the citizens whose signatures are affixed to this paper, propose to read to you these resolutions embodying the opinions of your neighbors, in the hope and expectation, sir, that their earnest protest may not go unheeded."

He then in a loud and clear voice read the scathing resolutions from end to end. This done he folded the paper and gave it to Colonel Macie who had not the presence of mind to refuse to accept it.

"Good afternoon, sir; good afternoon, madam. Gentlemen," turning to his followers, "I believe our business at Brentwood is concluded for the present."

Colonel Washington clambered with dignity into his carriage, followed by Major Blackburn, who had not uttered a single word.

"Thank you, Murphy," said the colonel, "that'll do now. I've got a clear conscience and I know my own road home."

As the procession turned to depart, a horseman drew rein before the door. The man was a stranger from the Forest.

"Doctor Carniel. Is Doctor Carniel here?" he called. Several men pointed out Doctor Carniel, who came hurrying forward.

"Yes, I'm Doctor Carniel. Am I needed? Any one hurt? Anything the matter?"

The man leaned down from his saddle and handed Doctor Carniel a note. The doctor broke the seal and read. He hesitated a moment, then lifting his hat from his head he stood uncovered.

"Gentlemen," he said in a steady voice, "it is with very deep sorrow that I inform you that the friend you have this day

sought to aid is beyond the need of your assistance. Constance Brent is dead."

He handed the note to Judge Beckford, who had approached.

A murmur ran among the men. The doctor got into his buggy and drove swiftly away. The others followed slowly as the somber winter twilight closed about Brentwood.

CHAPTER XXVI

MISS CONSTANCE'S BURIAL

Four days later as the early evening was again somberly closing about Brentwood, another procession passed through the gates and approached the house. But before it reached the door it turned to the right and moved on slowly to the ancient burial place where, beside her father's grave, a new grave had been dug for Constance Brent.

The funeral service had been held in Weyanoke Church, the procession halting there on its way from the cabin in the forest. The old church had been crowded. The Beverleys and Washingtons from Piccadilly all were present. With them, of course, came Miss Page Dinwiddie.

Ada sat beside her mother, feeling helpless and at a loss, and strangely remote and shut away from John. He seemed inaccessible to her now in his time of sorrow.

Douglas Hamilton was with the party from Piccadilly, and sat at Agnes Beverley's side, attentive to that very cold young woman. Mrs. Macie was alone in the Blackburn pew; Colonel Macie was confined to the house by a bad sore throat, she said.

Murphy Bird, with Sadie Bird and Salvadorie and Grandpa Bird and Jake Yutsy and Jake Yutsy's wife, sat, as became their station, near the door. Many of the poorer whites, and many also of the better class of negroes, filled the more distant pews. They had come in all simple sincerity, after the fashion of the country, to pay their last tribute to Miss Constance Brent of Brentwood. Of these only a few followed the coffin to its final resting place at Brentwood.

The ceremony was solemn and impressive in the gathering dusk. The grave had been lined with pine and holly, and

many flowers covered the coffin. Nothing was left undone which could in any way soften the harsh ordeal.

John was dimly conscious that a carriage had driven rapidly up to Brentwood almost immediately after the funeral procession reached the burying-ground. But he was unaware until long afterward that the carriage contained Doctor Brent of Comorn Hall, who had come to witness the interment of his old master's daughter.

Hortense was in the carriage with her father, heavily muffled in her splendid furs. Brent himself wore a heavy overcoat lined with sealskin, with deep cuffs and collar of the same rich fur. A great wreath of deep green leaves was in the carriage before him.

When Doctor Brent's approach was observed two gentlemen detached themselves from the little group of pallbearers and went at once to meet him.

"I am surprised, gentlemen," Doctor Brent protested, "that you take it upon yourselves to deny me the privilege of witnessing the interment of one I knew so well. Can I not be allowed to lay my tribute on her grave?"

As he spoke he lifted the great wreath from the seat before him.

"You were her father's slave," said Judge Beckford, one of those who had advanced to check the approach of the master of Comorn, "and you are known to have received many kindnesses at her hands; but the burial is private; you can not proceed any farther."

"By whose authority do you speak, sir?" Brent demanded. "You may not be aware that I have rights which perhaps I might assert."

"Whatever your rights may be," Judge Beckford answered coldly, "I warn you that this is not the time or place to assert them. Just turn your horses and drive out of here at once."

"I'll give my own orders, Judge Beckford," Brent said with rising anger. "Colonel Macie is the only man who can tell me to leave Brentwood. I don't recognize your authority, sir. Drive on to the burying-ground," he added, addressing the

boy on the box. "No one here shall prevent me from paying my last tribute to Constance Brent."

"Murphy Bird?" Judge Beckford called sharply as the horses moved.

Instantly a detaining hand was placed upon the bridles.

"I'm right here, Judge," a mournful voice replied from near the horses' heads; "yes, sir, right here clost and handy."

"I believe you have driven this carriage once before," the judge remarked with a steely gleam of saturnine humor. "Oblige me now by climbing up there and taking those lines."

"It's certainly a pleasure to oblige you, Judge," said Mr. Bird as he clambered nimbly upon the box. "Set over, sonny," he said to Beecher Mably as he took the lines from the boy's unresisting hands. "Judge," he leaned down confidentially to the judge's ear, "would it be a-putting you to too much disinconvenience for to ask you to name it to gran'paw that I got a tote home, an' to ask him to be kearful of Salvadorie, an' drive Bertha cam?"

Then as Judge Beckford bent his head in acquiescence Doctor Brent's volunteer coachman addressed himself to Doctor Brent's spirited horses.

"Go long out of this afore I take the buggy whip to you," he cried, and before Doctor Brent could step from the victoria or repeat his protest he was being whirled away from Brentwood at a furious pace.

For a time Brent's rage choked him. He looked up at the lean, stoop-shouldered figure of the poor white on the box, and the bitterness of his humiliation and his hate was more than he could endure. He rose from his seat and stood erect in the victoria, clinging with one hand to the box while with the other he seized his undesired driver by his ragged coat and shook him vigorously.

"Stop!" he shouted. "Stop!"

"Anything wrong, Doc?" Mr. Bird asked, looking over his shoulder but keeping the horses still at their tremendous pace, bumping and jolting in and out of the half-frozen ruts, the mud and slush bespattering Brent's coat and face.

"Stop, I tell you. The boy can drive for me."

"'Deed he can," Mr. Bird replied. "He's a real good boy with horses when he's headed the right way."

"Give him those lines and get down off this carriage, do you hear me!" Brent cried, livid with rage.

"Certainly, Doc, certainly; I ain't deaf. Gran'pap is, but I ain't. Anything to accommodate you, if you are sure he kin drive you right home."

He emphasized the last word as the horses came to a stop.

"Now," said Brent, as Mr. Bird climbed slowly from the box, "now you can walk."

"Oh, I kin walk," Mr. Bird agreed with cheerful alacrity. "I ain't no trouble in my legs. Not none yet. No, sir, hit's the spine of my back that's been a-worrying me since I disremember when."

"Drive on," Brent cried to the boy on the box. "Drive on." A small hand clutched his arm.

"Why didn't you kill him, father?" Hortense asked.

"Some of these days I will," Brent answered as he cowered back in the victoria feeling the mud and icy water and the falling snow stinging his face.

"I'll show these white folks yet," he muttered, lapsing into the vernacular of his youth. "I reckon I'll teach them something before I'm done with them. The day may come when they'll wish they'd not gone out of their way to shame me. By God, I'll be even with old Mason Beckford yet if it's the last thing I do on earth. By God, I will!"

The girl leaned forward and toward him in her eagerness.

"Oh, if you could only get one of them in your power. If you could only hurt and insult them, if you could only pay them back for all they've done, for all they've put upon you and your people. If we could only enslave them as they once enslaved us. I'd beat some of them to death with my own hands."

"Some of them will wish they were dead before I'm through with them," her father answered. "I'll get even with them, I don't care what it costs."

"Gene will help us," the girl whispered.

"Hush," said her father quickly. "Don't speak of Gene."

Doctor Carniel would not permit John to go back to the cabin in the Forest, but made him stop at the Cross Roads for the night. There was little danger of any warrant serving at such a time. Death had taken Miss Constance into its merciful custody, and there would be less reason now to hunt and harry her son.

Mrs. Carniel made John sit down at the supper table, and tried to tempt him to eat; but the effort was so evidently a trial that on a sign from her husband she ceased to urge him, and he sat with his elbows resting on the table, his head supported in his hands, trying to smile and show his gratitude for all they sought to do for him, for all they had done for him and for his mother.

When supper was over, John afterward remembered, he followed the doctor into the office in the wing and sat before the open-faced wood stove in which the logs were crackling cheerfully.

Mrs. Carniel came in from her household duties and, glancing keenly in John's face, made an excuse to take the lamp away, leaving John and the doctor sitting in silence in the firelight.

She wore a crisp white apron, John remembered, and her gray hair was drawn back smoothly from her broad kindly brow.

The sentiment of home was very strong and full in the house and John thought of Brentwood in the peaceful days before trouble had come upon them, and of the winter nights when he and his mother had sat close by the hearth where the great logs blazed, while the wind sweeping over the frozen cove and across the snow-covered fields, rattled the old windows, making it good to be indoors.

And now his mother lay out there under the bare cold branches of the gaunt trees, housed in the frozen earth. If it had been summer-time, he thought, with the leaves whispering over the spot where she lay, with the grass green and fragrant

and deep, and if he could have stolen out in the night again and again to the quiet spot where she slept; ah, and if always from his windows he could look upon it; if he only were at Brentwood he felt that while there would be sadness there might yet be peace.

But now even the sweet memories of his home were shattered and dethroned, even into the past the shadows seemed to fall, carrying strife and contention, shame and humiliation to the very borderland of his memories.

And Brentwood itself; while his mother lived it was hers. They might take it from her, and send her into exile, but it was still hers. But now with her death it had passed to the usurpers.

And Ada, Ada was lost to him. If he had been branded with a red-hot iron upon his forehead he could not have been more marked and set apart from all his kind than he was now. Ada would wait, wait all her life long, she would be loyal, he knew that well enough, but, God, what was the use, what was the use?

"John," and Doctor Carniel laid his kind hand upon John's shoulder as he spoke, "sleep to-night, boy, and think things over in the morning. What you need now is rest. There's nothing can be settled now."

He removed his hand from John's shoulder and rested it lightly upon his forehead. Then he bent down and looked at John intently in the wavering firelight; then he shook his head as though in confirmation of some expected trouble.

"Come," he said at last. "It's time for bed."

John rose obediently. He seemed to grope his way toward the door. The doctor guided him. On the stairs he stumbled and swayed backward. The doctor put his arm across his shoulders to steady him. John laughed.

"That's all right, Doctor," he said. "That's all right."

Doctor Carniel got John to bed; he sank into a heavy sleep at once. Coming out on tiptoe the doctor found Mrs. Carniel weeping on the landing.

"Oh, Wash," she whispered, "isn't it too bad? I knew it

was coming on when he was here that night the sheriff came. You saw it then, didn't you?"

"Yes," her husband answered in the same low voice. "Yes, I saw it then. I don't know how he's fought it off so long. He's been under an awful strain, Matilda, and I'm afraid he's going to have a siege of it. It's been just one blow following another; it's been enough to drive him mad. Think of the disgrace they've branded upon him; his mother dead and Brentwood gone. I'm glad he held out while she lived."

The old doctor sighed wearily. The day had been long and hard and full of anxiety for him.

"You can pull him through, Wash?" his wife asked eagerly.

"You got to stand by me, Matilda," he answered evasively.

"Is it as bad as that?" she asked.

"I'm afraid it is, Matilda. When a boy like John breaks down he breaks harder than those who have less strength."

"I know," said Mrs. Carniel, speaking from her long experience, "I know. What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going down to the office to mix some medicines."

"Then I'll go in and sit by the bed, I reckon. Have you thought about Ada Beverley?"

"I've been thinking about her all day."

"You'll get her word about John in the morning?"

"Yes, in the morning. I'll be back in half an hour. If you want me, call me."

He went noiselessly down the stairs and Mrs. Carniel heard him opening the doors softly as he passed from room to room on his way to his office in the wing.

Then she went into the sewing-room and drawing her chair to the bedside prepared to watch John through the night.

CHAPTER XXVII

MR. BIRD MOVES TO PICCADILLY

The day following Doctor Brent's enforced departure from Miss Constance's burial he sent a curt note to Murphy Bird, requesting that unfortunate individual to pay the arrears of his rent at once, and to vacate the house he occupied on the Comorn land within thirty days unless he desired to bring upon himself legal proceedings.

Mr. Bird received the blow in silence. Not so Grandpa Bird.

"Such a piece of impudence," he snapped in querulous alarm. "I declare I wouldn't take it off'n any nigger."

"What you going to do now, Murphy Bird?" his wife demanded with resentful hopelessness.

"Me?" queried her lord and master with impersonal detachment. "Oh, I reckon I'll just go on doing as I always done. I don't see no cause for to change."

Mr. Bird was already adjusting his stooping shoulders to the new misfortune.

"But this letter says we've got to move in thirty days," persisted Mrs. Bird.

"Well, if we got to move," said Mr. Bird, a trifle nettled, "we got to move. I ain't calling no man a liar, but I wouldn't of took it upon me for to prophesy if I'd 'a' been Doctor J. C. Brent. Who can foretell the future any ways? If there's foreordination an' Scripture into hit we'll move, an' if there ain't we won't."

"There may be foreordination into hit," said Grandpa Bird, who was a mighty theologian, "but I can't see no Scripture."

"How you talk," cried Mrs. Bird, fast losing her patience. "What's foreordination got to do with it?"

"Suppose," said Mr. Bird reflectively, "that the world was to take an' come to an end afore them thirty days was up?"

"You'd move then, I reckon," said Mrs. Bird, seeing and seizing her advantage, "but there'd be no foretelling about it. Where we going to move, Murphy Bird? I'll trouble you to tell me that."

"It ain't no trouble. Somewheres else, I reckon. We got thirty days to move in, ain't we, an' that nigger man may change his mind about it, or be driv off the Neck. A body can't tell. I don't reckon there's no need to hurry me."

"You may have thirty days to move in, Murphy Bird, but you ain't got one day for to pay up the back rent in." Mrs. Bird did some rapid calculation with the assistance of her fingers. "Two dollars a month. Three months. Six dollars. Where's them six dollars to come from? What'll you do if he warrants you? He'll put the law onto you as sure as you're setting there if you ain't able to raise them six dollars. An' so far as I can see you're just as apt to raise the dead. I don't know how I ever was such a fool as to marry up with a man like you."

And Mrs. Bird burst into tears.

"I don't neither," assented Mr. Bird. "If I was a single man, and an orphan like some men is, I don't reckon old Chotank would see no more of me than my coat tails an' my shoe tracks. I'd put out west an' take a man's chance." An idea seemed to take possession of Mr. Bird, he reflected deeply. "There's Bertha, a man to Warsaw—"

"You sell Bertha," said Mrs. Bird, divining her husband's purpose, "and how'll we move? Ain't you no sense left, Murphy Bird?"

"I don't talk about it. I don't talk about it," said Mr. Bird. The gleam of hope faded out of his pale eyes. He thought a moment. "That nigger man's the most meanest man I ever see. I think a little kerosene'd do that nigger a heap more good than he deserves. I got a hog out to my pen that's a heap gratefuller than most niggers is to white folks. You got any matches onto you, Gran'pap?"

"You going to burn the nigger man, pap?" asked Salvadorie.

"No, son, I reckon not, I reckon not. But a body never can tell. I was just a-figuring on lighting my pipe." He paused thoughtfully, his gaze fixed on the ceiling that he might not encounter his wife's accusing eye. "I reckon mebbly I done that hog an injustice," he added with a deprecatory gesture. "Yes, sir, I reckon I did. She's a real good hog. You got any tobacco about your clothes, Gran'pap?"

"Will you listen to me, Murphy Bird," cried Mrs. Bird, in the last stages of exasperation. "Ain't it enough that we ain't got a roof over our heads, but you set there and stare at the ceiling like you was deaf."

"I might say I wisht I was," said Mr. Bird, "an' not be telling no lie. A body'd rather be afflicted into his ears than into the spine of his back the way I been. I made sure I'd kill myself a-working on the woodpile the way I done, but no, sir, I'm here yet, an' that nigger doctor with his long-tail coat an' his stovepipe hat got the better of me, an' me a white man an' nothing to do but to set down an' take it."

An hour later the united wisdom of Mrs. Bird, Murphy Bird and Grandpa Bird had produced the following dignified reply to Doctor Brent's communication, Mrs. Bird's penmanship being sufficiently clear to offer no serious obstacle to the elegance and completeness of the ideas conveyed.

"Dr. Brent. dear sir," the epistle ran. "Your letter rec'd today. I regret to say as soon as I make the money I will kindly come down and settle the bill when convenient. Respt yours. Murphy Bird."

Then Mr. Bird, feeling that he had met the situation face to face and grappled with it man to man, proceeded to attach Bertha to the wagon. It was his purpose to take the letter to the post-office at the Cross Roads. In this dark mood Salvadorie was forbidden to accompany his father, but as usual, threats, warnings and entreaties were without avail.

"Bertha's gone lame an' she ain't able for to tote no such a load," Mr. Bird declared. "I got business to the Cross Roads, myself."

"Don't you try to borrow them six dollars off of sister," Mrs. Bird interposed. "Nor off Jake Yutsy neither."

"Who wants to borrow six dollars?" Mr. Bird demanded with gentle bitterness. "You get down off that wagon, Salvadorie, or you'll wish you had," he cried with mild ferocity.

The child never stirred.

His father temporized.

"Well, you wait till I take an' trim this sassafras switch. I'll dust the seat of your panties. I'll shoo the June flies off your jacket. I'll give you the worst trouncing you ever got. Yes, sir, me an' you an' this sassafras switch between us will just about riz the dead. I reckon when I lay it onto you folks'll reckon they'll think your pap's a-killing hogs."

As he spoke he trimmed a switch skilfully.

"Oh, go long, pap. You can't skeer me," replied the undaunted Salvadorie. "You hold the lines an' I'll hit Bertha with the sassafras switch."

"Don't you lay a finger's weight of that switch onto Bertha," said Mr. Bird. "I reckon I can drive Bertha without no help from you. Get ap. Get ap. Don't you try for to set down in them shafts, Bertha. This ain't no rocking chair. Get ap. A body'd think you was hitched to a tree by the way you go so fast. If I knowed a misfortune was a-coming I'd tie it to your tail, an' I don't reckon then it'd get nowhere into my time. If the Judgment Day's as slow a-coming as what you is a-going I reckon a body could carry on scandalous an' never get fetched up with. If I was a nigger man, mebbly I'd be driving a span of horses an' a-splashing mud onto my betters. But a white man ain't what he used to be when a nigger man can ask him for six dollars cash an' give him thirty days for to quit the house he's a-living into an' threaten for to lay the law onto him. Times is changed in old Virginia, an' they ain't changed none for the better. Abraham Lincoln an'

them gentlemen had ought to 'a' thought twicet afore they did what they done. Yes, sir, they ought to 'a' thought twicet."

"What did they do, pap, him an' them gentlemen?"

"Why, they set the niggers free, that's what they done. And they are well spoken of for it, but I declare they never could 'a' foreseed this or they'd 'a' thought twicet."

But Mr. Bird's troubles having had a beginning seemed, as is not infrequently the case, to be without end. Arrived at the Cross Roads Mr. Bird's first thought was to post his letter. To accomplish this required a financial transaction of some importance to Mr. Bird, between himself and the Government of the United States. It was Mr. Bird's intention to negotiate the purchase of a postage stamp on credit.

Possessed of this fixed purpose Mr. Bird entered the post-office with as bold a front as he could assume.

"Evening," said Mr. Bird, uncomfortably aware of a group of negroes loitering before the little window through which Mrs. Dandridge conducted the business of the government. "I'd like for to have the accommodation of a two-cent stamp for to stick to the back of this here letter."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Dandridge and proceeded to detach a tiny portrait of the Father of his Country from a sheet of similar portraits. Mr. Bird's hopes rose. They were destined, however, to sink again when he observed that Mrs. Dandridge retained the portrait in her hand while she regarded Mr. Bird with a certain air of expectation most disconcerting to that gentleman.

"Two cents, please," said Mamie Ann at last, breaking the oppressive silence.

"I was just a-thinking," said Mr. Bird, addressing the ceiling as though it were an old and confidential friend. "I was just a-thinking that if I could charge her onto my account to Mr. Hesketh's store without causing no hard feelings, it'd be about the best way for to settle for hit. I ain't," said Mr. Bird, who was essentially a truthful person and had no desire to mislead the ceiling or the government or the government's

lawful representative in a matter of importance, "I ain't been an' named it to Mr. Hesketh that I was a-going to throw the charge for this here stamp onto my standing account. No, sir, I ain't named it to him yet; but knowing him to be the gentleman I've always knowed him for to be, I ain't afraid to go to him an' say—"

But Mamie Ann cut him short.

"Postage stamps are not sold on credit here," she said with icy contempt. "If your credit is really good for the amount, perhaps Mr. Hesketh will advance you the two cents you need. If he does you can come back and get your stamp."

As Mr. Bird withdrew, an audible titter ran among the negroes. Even before he had closed the door upon the scene of his humiliation a loud laugh rose. He knew himself its object. Mamie Ann's voice now joined the others. The derisive laughter followed Mr. Bird across the road to the door of Mr. Hesketh's store. How long it lingered in the soul of the poor white, perhaps even he could not have told.

"That you back again, Murphy Bird?" sharply demanded the irascible but not unkindly old storekeeper as the poor white apologetically edged through the doorway followed by Salvadorie, attached, as usual, to the skirt of his parent's coat.

"Yes, sir, I reckon so, I reckon so," Mr. Bird admitted. "I wouldn't be surprised if it was."

"Then I wouldn't be surprised if you'd come for another bottle of your tonic bitters. Why doesn't that child let go your coat tails?" Mr. Hesketh asked with what seemed to Salvadorie's father needless irritation. "Can't you see he's left the door wide open, and I've got neuralgia so bad I don't know what to do. No," he added, as a matronly figure approached the steps, "don't shut it in Mrs. Carniel's face. Any child should know better than that. You'll find all the calico patterns I've got right over there on the counter, ma'am, I got them down for you to see. I reckon you'll find something to suit you among them."

Mr. Hesketh turned again to Mr. Bird, who had received a pleasant salutation from the doctor's wife.

"So you're to be turned off the Comorn property in thirty days, I hear. Doctor Brent's been telling all the niggers that he won't have you on his land."

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Bird, "Doc Brent's give me just thirty days to move in. Thirty days was what he named to me in a piece of writing he sent me down this forenoon."

"Well," said the old storekeeper, "that ought to be twenty-nine days more than you'd want to get off his property. A white man has no business living on a black man's land," he added, lowering his voice as the door was opened and three of the negro loungers from the post-office slouched in, and approaching the counter, made an excuse of purchasing a pack of tobacco presently to take up their places by the stove.

Here again Mr. Bird saw with a sinking heart he was not to be permitted a decent privacy to transact his confidential business. His spirit wavered. He evaded the great vital question of the postage stamp. His eye wandered; then it became fixed.

"Is them bottles of Libby's True Blue Lily Pad Liver Pills onto the top shelf guaranteed to cure?" he asked with deepening interest. "I ain't tried them."

"Then it's the only kind I've ever had in stock that you haven't tried," said Mr. Hesketh.

Mr. Bird felt dimly that Mr. Hesketh was mixing his neuralgia altogether too much with his manners and his conversation.

"If you'd quit dosing yourself and take a steady job you'd be another man." Mr. Hesketh's mood was not encouraging.

For the moment Mr. Bird relinquished his fond anticipations of making certain scientific internal experiments with Libby's True Blue Lily Pad Liver Pills and fixed his attention on a row of bottles wrapped in green tissue-paper.

"Ain't them bottles of Old Doctor Cuffy's Cough Cure? I was a-thinking if I was to take another bottle it might do me good. I'm a-beginning to think my lungs is weak. Yes, sir, I'll take along a bottle of Old Doctor Cuffy's Cough Cure if my credit'll stand the strain. An' I'll take a bottle of Libby's

True Blue Lily Pad Liver Pills, an' six sticks of peppermint candy for Salvadorie and," lowering his voice to an uneasy whisper, "I'd like for to trouble you for the loan of two cents cold cash in hand, for to pay for a postage stamp that's laid out an' waiting for me at the post-office for to put onto this piece of writing for Doc Brent."

Mr. Hesketh's hand left the bottle of Libby's True Blue Lily Pad Liver Pills, for which it had been reaching, and firmly withdrew the bottle of Old Doctor Cuffy's Cough Cure which he had already placed before Mr. Bird upon the counter.

"A postage stamp," repeated Mr. Hesketh in a tone which plainly indicated that he had received a personal affront. "A postage stamp. Why couldn't you take your letter up to Comorn Hall? If you didn't want to take it yourself, couldn't you send your boy with it? No, sir, you can't have a cent's worth more credit in this store, and you can't have even two cents in cash until you stop dosing yourself and get some sense into your head. Don't go. You wait right here till I make out your bill. Ain't that child sickly enough already? Ain't its stomach weak enough as it is from all your dosing without filling it full of stick candy? I declare you make me lose my patience. A man of your strength wasting his time and money trying to drug himself to death. There's your bill; eight dollars and thirty-six cents, counting the things your wife got yesterday. And remember you don't get another cent's worth of credit here to fool away on nonsense. There's no use coming to me for postage stamps when you're only a stone's throw from the place where the man lives you're writing to. I'm altogether out of patience with you."

As he spoke Mr. Hesketh thrust the bill across the counter.

A titter ran among the negroes grouped about the stove. But it was silenced instantly. Mrs. Carniel had left the rolls of calico she had been examining.

"Mr. Hesketh," she cried, her voice ringing with indignant protest, "Mr. Hesketh, I won't stand here and let you speak so to Mr. Bird, and before these colored people, too. There isn't a man—"

But the poor white was gone.

Even Salvadorie, dimly apprehending the deep humiliation to which his father had been subjected, refrained from lamenting the peppermint candy upon which his heart had been set, and was silent. Bertha, too, appeared aware, by some mysterious telepathy, that her master's soul was in the dust and so forbore to switch her tail across the lines, or to balk or threaten to sit down in the shafts, and limped on patiently toward the habitation which Mr. Bird had once called home.

A mile or more had been traversed ere Salvadorie found courage to slip his plump little hand into the great rough hand which hung, pathetically idle and inert, at his father's side.

At the touch of the child's fingers the great fingers closed tenderly about them, and two tears welled up in the gray eyes of the poor white and trickled slowly down his nose.

The next day Colonel Washington's chariot stopped before the door of Mr. Bird's habitation. The colonel found the object of his search crouched over the stove in the kitchen. Salvadorie was between his knees. Gloom and despair had settled over the stricken household; but Grandpa Bird made a decent effort at hospitality as the colonel blustered in.

"Walk in, Colonel. Walk right in, sir, an' rest your hat an' take a chair," the patriarch said. "Fine day for those as ain't got trouble onto their minds. Grand day for those that was born with a silver spoon into their mouths an' ain't lost it out. You go on out to the field, Salvadorie, an' toll them hogs home with a ear of corn. An' then fetch in a turn of wood. Your pap don't seem to pay no attention to nothing."

"And how are you, Murphy?" asked the colonel.

"Me? I'm that low into my mind, Colonel, an' that downspirited I ain't fitten for nothing. I disremember if I was ever as low into my mind afore as what I am now. The way it looks to me it seems like I'm sinking into a decline. My feelings all forebodes it. I carried the cow as far as the bars but I hadn't the strength for to turn her into the lot. I ain't

had the heart for to milk her yet, an' I ain't watered Bertha since I come home last night from the Cross Roads, nor I ain't so much as slopped the hogs. I ain't able. If I'd 'a' took another bottle of them last bitters for my stomach I'd 'a' been a new man an' I might 'a' faced the world. Yes, sir, another dose might 'a' helped me some, but Mis' Bird begrudged the outlay. Mis' Bird she put out to Jake Yutsy's last night for to see her sister. She said she'd never set foot into this place again till I'd paid that nigger man to Comorn Hall six dollars rent. Writin' didn't satisfy her, an' I've lost my credit to the store. Old man Hesketh was so put out when I priced a bottle of Tonic Bitters, an' asked for six sticks of peppermint candy for to give to Salvadorie, an' for two cents in cold cash for to pay for a postage stamp I had the promise of, that he flared up so it liked to knock me over an' kept me standing right thar whilst he drawed out my bill in full. Yes, sir, to the last cent. He drawed it out an' she totaled eight dollars an' thirty-six cents, an' he as good as ordered me out of his store. An' there was three niggers an' a white lady, Mis' Carniel it was, heard it all. I wisht I'd 'a' gone out west when I was young. I thought some of doing it, but my time's gone by, I reckon."

"Murphy's failing fast," said Grandpa Bird anxiously. "I don't see what's a-going to become onto us. If Doctor Carniel was to come to see him hit might put some heart into him. But whar's the money to come from for to settle with Mr. Hesketh an' to pay them six dollars back rent to that nigger doctor, I declare I don't see. An' thar's the future. Thar's the outlook into what's a-coming. Judging the future by the past I don't see no hope into hit."

"There ain't," said Mr. Bird with melancholy resignation. "There ain't a living soul could of bore up under such a heap of tribulations as what I've bore up under. But I've quit. Yes, sir, I've quit. The foolishhest thing was ever beginning. Don't you ever begin nothing, Salvadorie," he added in gentle admonition to his son who had returned from bringing in the "turn of wood," "don't you ever begin nothing an' then

your womenfolks can't never say you quit it like you always done. Eight dollars an' thirty-six cents owing to Mr. Hesketh an' six dollars owing to that nigger doctor. If Jake Yutsy was to close in onto me now for what I owe him for shoeing Bertha, an' a long-standing account for repairing, I reckon I'd be the most down-heartedest man living. I ain't got a friend on earth, no I ain't, nor a body I can turn to, an' I don't deserve none, I reckon."

"Don't talk like that, Murphy," said the colonel warmly. "Old man Hesketh told me himself he'd been hasty. Here's that bottle of cough cure. He sent it along by me, and here's a package of candy for Salvadorie; he sent that, too. He says you can run your account up as high as twelve dollars. Your credit's good in his store for that amount any day in the week. So you needn't worry about that. And as for leaving this place, I don't reckon a white man wants to stay here when the Beverleys have gone. There's the old cabin on my shore a half mile from Piccadilly. You're welcome to it, and I'll not charge you a cent for rent the first year, if you'll fix it up so you can live in it. It's in pretty bad condition, but not so much worse than this. And there's a ten-acre field goes along with it. Move in, move in any day, and I'll send one of my boys and a team over to help you tote your things across. There isn't a man in this part of the county that's thought more of by his neighbors than you are, Murphy, and we'll all be glad to see you living on a white man's land again."

The colonel fumbled in an inner pocket and drew forth a wallet.

"Ready money's a scarce article with me. Everybody knows that, but here's six dollars. I'll advance you this to pay Julius Cæsar what you owe him. You can work it out at Piccadilly as soon as you get moved and settled. I'm having some ties cut. You take this money over to Comorn Hall and then send word to the Cross Roads for Sadie Bird. She ought to be here getting things packed and ready to move."

Mr. Bird sat speechless.

As though to give reality to his words, Colonel Washington solemnly deposited the bottle of cough cure on the table, and beside it placed the little bundle containing six sticks of peppermint candy wrapped in a scant piece of thin paper, and tied with a white string.

A moisture gathered in the poor white's eyes. He pushed the little bundle toward Salvadorie.

"Son," said Mr. Bird in his softest voice, "son, you thank Colonel Washington for what he's fetched you. Your pap would do it but he ain't able. An' don't you ever be so ungrateful as to name it to a body that you ain't got no friends, no, sir, don't you do that, or I'll take an' switch you good the way you ought to be switched."

Before half of the thirty days allotted by Doctor Brent had passed, Murphy Bird and Sadie Bird with Grandpa Bird and Salvadorie had departed to the rickety old cabin on the shore of Piccadilly, and Comorn knew them no more.

"What this house needs," said Mr. Bird, surveying his new abode with the practised eye of one familiar with rural dilapidation in all its aspects, "what this house needs is some ten penny nails drove in where they'll do the most good. There ain't no one likes lath an' plaster better than what I do, but I'd a heap rather take a view of it from the inside. They ain't like weather-boarding for to keep out wet an' cold. But take it or leave it I reckon it's our house and home. Colonel Washington named it to me that I could keep back the first year's rent for to put onto repairs. But if I ain't got it how'm I a-going to keep it back? He couldn't of thought of that. So far as I can see, them repairs just got to wait for the Lord's own time. I ain't a-dictating none. The future ain't into my hands. If she was I'd fix her different."

Mr. Bird retired to a convenient fragment of a once prosperous fence, and leaning against it at an angle best calculated to afford relief to the spine of his back, let his eye wander over the surroundings of his home.

"If I could of chose my choice," he said to Grandpa Bird, who shared his contemplation and his confidence, "if I could

of chose my choice I'd of set her a little closter to the road an' a little further from the swamp. An' I'd 'a' took an' put the hog pen about where the house stands, so's the hogs could 'a' wallowed into the branch like they like to do, an' no water to carry. Running water's a grand thing for hogs, an' I reckon they need it. I do hear Judge Beckford's got it piped right into Avalon house, like he had a never-failing spring into every room. I wouldn't 'a' gone so far as that, but running water's a grand thing for hogs."

CHAPTER XXVIII

DOCTOR BRENT PAYS CASH

What yet remained of the short Virginian winter soon passed. At the Cross Roads John Brent was slowly recovering from a severe and wasting illness.

After Miss Constance's death the Brentwood estate had been thrown into the courts for settlement, Miss Bessie claiming that under her uncle's will she was sole heir. Counter-claims were at once set up in John Brent's name, but the Macies retained possession of Brentwood and it seemed probable that the struggle might drag on for years. Neither side wished to force the issue. The Macies dared not rest their whole case on the evidence of Doctor J. C. Brent, and John's advisers were equally unwilling to have the ex-slave summoned as a witness until they were certain that his testimony could be refuted. So each side temporized, hoping that time might prove their ally.

At Comorn Hall, as the spring opened, Doctor Brent became active in the improvement and cultivation of his lands. Neglected fields were cleared again, and plowed and sown. The farm buildings were repaired and painted, old fences were strengthened, new fences built, and gates were put up at all the entrances to the property as though not only to mark the boundaries but to exclude the hostile whites.

Higher wages were paid at Comorn Hall than on any other plantation in the county. Brent's neighbors soon found it difficult to secure farm-hands, and those who were to be had demanded the same wages Brent was paying. This state of affairs occasioned no little hardship in the community where farming, at its best, was none too profitable.

Brent's presence in the old manor house thus became a personal matter to almost every white man and negro on Beverley's Neck.

"It's a good sign," Colonel Washington said philosophically when these matters were brought to his attention. "It's a good sign. I tell you, gentlemen, it won't take that nigger long at the rate he's going to run through with everything he has. Then maybe he'll clear out and go back north. He's kicking up a lot of dust at Comorn now, but a rain will come and lay it. Then he'll see it's just the same old sand and clay it always was. Just the same, sir. He'll never get his money back in this world."

When Doctor Brent now went beyond his own borders it was often to visit the sick bed of some negro. It pleased him to give his services without charge to any of his race who sent for him. It gave him access to the cabins of the negroes and satisfied a craving, of which he was but half aware, to touch again the free life of his youth.

He made the presence of Bishop Comfort, a well-known religious leader, an excuse to attend an evening service in the little negro church near Comorn Old Gate.

Bishop Comfort was a massive man of forceful and distinguished presence; his ebony visage, touched with the worldliness and importance of his office, framed in grizzled hair. Like Brent he had been born a slave on a plantation in the South. He had acquired some education in his youth, but chiefly he owed his advance in life to sheer persistency and to a selfish greed for office and for power. He had brutally shouldered from his path all those who opposed his progress, until at last he had reached a commanding position in his church and among his people.

Brent's unexpected presence in the congregation was very welcome to the bishop, and he hastily left the rickety platform upon which the pulpit stood and went forward impressively to meet the new champion of religious equality.

The introduction of the great men was effected by Mrs. Mamie Ann Dandridge, the postmistress of Weyanoke. Mrs.

Dandridge's brother, the negro editor, Samuel Adriance, was one of Bishop Comfort's intimates and allies.

Brent had for some time past perceived that Mamie Ann viewed him with satisfaction and approval. Her attitude was so consistently sympathetic that at times Brent felt it to be almost impressive. The woman was undoubtedly attractive, and Brent too human to censure her for a partiality which he felt to be so well founded. Yet caution had caused him to visit the post-office as seldom as possible.

Doctor Brent marked the first anniversary of his purchase of Comorn by paying off the five thousand dollars still due Mrs. Beverley. He had been greatly irritated by certain idle gossip to the effect that the Beverleys were anxious to renew their mortgage, hoping ultimately to recover the property when he should reach the bottom of his pocket.

Colonel Washington, to whom the talk was attributed, had indeed laid some foundation for it by averring unguardedly that at the rate Brent was spending money he "reckoned Cousin Jinny would have to look out if she didn't want the place thrown back upon her hands."

Chafing under these rumors Brent requested Colonel Macie to inform Colonel Washington that he was both willing and ready to make the final payment, and a day was appointed for the conclusion of the transaction, and a meeting arranged at Comorn Hall.

When it became known at Piccadilly that the five thousand dollars was to be paid, Mrs. Beverley insisted that Colonel Washington should lift the mortgage which had hung for a year like a blight above Piccadilly.

"No, Jinny," said the colonel, "no, Jinny, you-all quit tempting me. You put your money on deposit in the bank in Baltimore, and if you don't buy a farm of your own, and I'm crowded to the wall, it will be time enough then to talk about helping me out."

But when Mrs. Washington and Miss Page, and even his sons, had added their entreaties to Mrs. Beverley's, and Watt

and Ada and Agnes had begged him to listen to their mother, the colonel had at last been vanquished.

"I surrender! I surrender!" he cried. "Everybody quit your talking. I surrender. I don't like that nigger holding a hatchet over my head any better than you-all do. To tell you the truth, I haven't slept a good many nights, wondering which way I'd turn if Julius Cæsar wouldn't renew the loan next year. You never can tell what a nigger will do, especially when he's a nigger on horseback. The only thing I stipulate is that if Jinny and the children do take up this loan they've got to hold the mortgage on Piccadilly to secure them."

"Very well," said Mrs. Beverley, "if you won't hear to our plan we will agree to yours rather than that negro shall hold this sword over your head another year."

When this happy arrangement had been agreed upon it was decided that Ada and Agnes, accompanied by Watt, should pay a visit of two weeks' duration to their father's sister in Baltimore. Mrs. Beverley promised to join them for a few days when the Comorn business was concluded to do a little necessary shopping.

Colonel Washington, more relieved, perhaps, than any of those who had with such difficulty persuaded him that a course advantageous to his own interests might be honorably pursued, at once communicated to Colonel Macie Mrs. Beverley's desire to take up the mortgage which Doctor Brent held on Piccadilly. He was somewhat surprised that the carpet-bagger permitted several days to pass before he found it convenient to reply. When at length Colonel Macie wrote it was to say Doctor Brent would consider the matter with Colonel Washington when they met at Comorn.

"Humph," said the colonel. "But it will be all right, I reckon."

On the day appointed he presented himself at Comorn armed with credentials to conclude both transactions. Colonel Macie represented Doctor Brent.

When Colonel Washington handed the papers which Mrs.

Beverley had executed to Colonel Macie, he was not a little surprised to see Doctor Brent draw five crisp one-thousand-dollar bills from an ample wallet; these, with other bills of different denominations to make up the interest, he handed to Colonel Macie, who in turn handed them to Colonel Washington.

The sum, principal and interest, was correct to a penny.

"I wasn't expecting cash," said Colonel Washington, as he wrote a receipt. "And now about the Piccadilly mortgage," he added, turning to Doctor Brent. "I believe Colonel Macie has told you that Mrs. Beverley wishes to assume it. I don't suppose you will have any objection to taking back four of these thousand-dollar bills and calling that transaction off."

"I regret that I must disappoint you, Colonel Washington," Brent answered with chill civility. "I do not find it convenient to change the form of my investment. It was my understanding, when you solicited the loan, that you would have been glad if it could run even a longer time. So far as it concerns me it is a business matter; I presume you do not wish to put it on a personal basis."

"Certainly not," said the colonel stiffly, though his heart sank within him. "Business is business."

"Business is business," Brent repeated. "I think I prefer to hold my mortgage on Piccadilly for another year. If I had reached the bottom of my pocket I might need the money, but I haven't."

As Colonel Washington's carriage followed Colonel Macie's buggy away from the door of Comorn, Brent returned to the library.

In another year, he thought, he'd be turning Jim Washington out of Piccadilly. The Beverleys would soon scatter their money, and it wasn't likely that any one else would take up the mortgage. No, it looked to him as though he would be the owner of Piccadilly in another year. When it came into his hands he'd put a negro family there to tenant the place, or better still, he'd turn the house into a hog pen. Yes, that's what he would do to show his contempt for the people who

had lived there. They'd talked about driving him out of the community. Well, it looked as though he wouldn't be the first to go.

And yet when he had made the loan, before his advent in Virginia, he remembered saying to himself that he would rather lose the money than foreclose the mortgage, if, as Colonel Macie had intimated, the master of Piccadilly should find difficulty in meeting his notes when they came due. Well, he thought, it wasn't his fault if he had changed his mind.

Busy with such musings he pushed open a door that led from the library into a narrow corridor and was startled to come suddenly upon Old Henrietta.

"Mother," he said with ill-concealed displeasure, "how long have you been waiting here? Why didn't some one let me know that you wanted to see me?"

"How long's I been here?" the old woman repeated evasively. "Oh, I'se been here long enough to hear my son Julius tell a white man he hadn't reached the bottom of his pocket yet. I reckon you'll be putting Hamp and me in Piccadilly house in time. In time."

"What brought you here to-day?" Brent asked.

"Lorella's had another spell. Hamp reckoned you'd better come up and look at her."

"I'll come up before dark," he answered. He was eager to end the interview. He heard his wife's step in the hall. But Old Henrietta held her place.

"Oh, she knows," she said, referring to Mrs. Brent, who had entered the corridor. "I'se her mother-in-law, I is. Mayby she ain't proud about it," she added as Mrs. Brent hurriedly passed into the dining-room, "but that's what I is. Old Hetty's mother-in-law to a proud white lady." She laughed derisively as her son drew her into the library and closed the door.

"Well," she mocked, "if white folks can't do no better by themselves than marry up with niggers they got to own their nigger kin. She ain't the first, and she ain't a-gwine to be the last. Afore long Old Mammy Hetty'll be paying her best

respects at Avalon. Mason Beckford's blood an' mine'll mix yet, if all I hears is so. Folks say there's a young stranger a-paying his court to Miss Polly. An' folks say she's mad in love with him. My blood'll mix with Mason Beckford's yet, though he mayn't know whose blood it is flows in his grand-child. But Old Hetty'll know. Old Hetty'll know."

"For God's sake be quiet," Brent cried in alarm. "How did you guess? Who told you? Was it my wife?"

"No one ain't told me nothing," the old woman said. "No need. I seen you meet him in the woods one day. An' I'se seen him come here, an' I heard him whistle, an' I seen you come to the do' an' let him in. An' soon I knowed he was your son. If Judge Beckford's girl marries Old Hetty's grandson will they ask me to the wedding? And my own sister, the one folks called Yellow Nelly, she was a slave at Avalon. They sold her south. And now Yellow Nelly's sister'll be gran'mammy to Judge Beckford's daughter." She laughed. "White folks'll have to own their nigger kin at last."

"You haven't told Hamp? You haven't breathed this to a living soul?" he questioned breathlessly.

The idea that he must now regard his mother as his confidante appalled him. Yet there was a strange support and comfort in it too.

"Yo' set yo' mind at rest, honey. Yo' Old Mammy Hetty ain't intentioning on spoiling no sport. This is the day she's been a-praying for. This is the day she seen afar when she was a-hoeing in the corn-fields, an' stripping tobacco leaves in old-time slavery days. I tol' 'em then dat dis day was a-comin' an' they laughed at me. An' I tells 'em now that other days is comin' yet, other days an' better days."

She paused. Another train of thought appeared to present itself to her mind. She regarded the disturbed countenance of her son furtively. An artful look crept over her features, lingering longest in her eyes.

"What's you gwine to give your old mammy to-day, honey? You give Miss Jinny Beverley them five one-thousand-dollat

bills; ain't you got one for Mammy Hetty too? Why, bless de child," she cried. "You done come home to be a comfort to yo' Old Mammy Hetty in her declining days. You done so sure enough. Bless God! Bless God!" As she spoke she rolled the bills which he had given her about her crooked fingers lovingly.

"Mind you keep that white wife of yours out of mischief," she said in a guarded undertone. "Seems to me I seen a change in her since Mr. Eugene Raymond came to old Northmoreland County for to make his home among the white folks." She hesitated and again the furtive artful look returned as she asked: "Was it to-morrow Jim Washington said Jinny Beverley was going to take the boat for Baltimore?"

"To-morrow, I reckon," Brent answered. Something in his mother's question roused his curiosity. "What made you think of that?" he asked.

"Laws, child, I'se knowed Miss Jinny since she was so high," Old Henrietta answered indifferently. "I just thought I'd ask her how she liked living at Piccadilly on charity. They was grand people in their day. People of pride and position. There wasn't none grander than the Beverleys of Comorn Hall. They traveled high, I tell you, an' their coach made a big dust on the road. They were the real old quality people. Old Virginia Blood Royal, as folks calls it. But they're laid low at last, bless God. Their day's done. An' my yellow boy Julius Cæsar he's the Lord of Comorn now."

Again she moved toward the door.

But Brent detained her.

"Wait," he said. "You're sure you haven't told a soul on earth what you've told me just now?"

"Not a living soul, so help me God. I ain't breathed a word." She lowered her voice to a husky whisper. "I'se lived south, I has. I'se seen more'n one of our people shot to death, or dangling and sprawling in the air from a rope's end. Yas, an' I've squatted back of a broken shutter an' seen a mob of crazy white devils tie a nigger to a tree with a well chain, an' I've heard him screaming his soul out like he was a-perishing

in hell while the fire burned the flesh off his bones. Nigger is got to learn to hold their tongues till their day dawns. Ol Mammy Hetty's held hers, or she'd 'a' been dust an' ashes an' a heap of burnt bones long ago. Doan' you fear for me honey, I stands by my own flesh an' blood."

There were excitement and dismay at Piccadilly when Colonel Washington returned from Comorn Hall.

"It's all over, Jinny," the colonel said, as Mrs. Beverley came from the door to meet him. "He's paid it all, every cent, interest and all. He's got Comorn sure enough."

"Well, I reckon it can't be helped," said practical Miss Page. "But you've got Piccadilly clear and free, thanks to the Lord and Cousin Jinny."

The colonel shook his head.

"No, I haven't," he answered with a show of cheerful indifference. "That blamed fool nigger won't release the mortgage."

"He won't release the mortgage," his hearers cried in a surprised unison. "He won't release the mortgage!"

"No," said the colonel, "he won't. He said he didn't care to change the form of his investment. And what do you suppose? He's paid the five thousand dollars in bank notes. That's the nigger of him, making a show of everything."

Mrs. Washington burst into tears.

"It's so humiliating," she sobbed, "it's so humiliating to have that negro holding a mortgage on our home. I couldn't wait till it was taken from his hands. And now no one knows what may happen."

"Don't give yourself the least anxiety on that score, sister," Mrs. Beverley interposed. "I shall put the money in the bank in Baltimore, and there it shall remain, at least four thousand dollars of it, until the time the mortgage must be met. I'm sorry Watt and the girls are away. I'll write Watt to meet me at the wharf in Baltimore. I won't feel safe until that money's in the bank."

That night Mrs. Beverley wrote to Watt, telling him of

Brent's refusal to release the Piccadilly mortgage, and that he had paid his debt to them in bills. She wished that the money had been paid by check as they expected. She would have no anxiety on board the boat, she wrote, but she would be nervous when she reached the city unless he met her and went with her to the bank.

Colonel Washington himself drove to the Cross Roads the next morning to post Mrs. Beverley's letter. With the best intentions, however, he permitted his social instincts to triumph over his punctuality—an easy victory—and it was close upon the hour when the mail closed as he pushed open the door of the little store in the rear of which Mamie Ann Dandridge conducted the business of the government.

The place, as usual, was crowded by a motley assemblage of negro idlers, whose chief occupation in life seemed to be to loiter there until the outgoing mail was postmarked and made up.

The better class of whites had long resented Mamie Ann's conduct of her office, which was marked by an extreme independence which not infrequently verged on insolence.

As Colonel Washington entered a burly negro, whose back was turned in his direction, was saying:

"Yes, sir, the last cent's been paid on Comorn Hall. And what's more Brother Brent's got the whip hand over old Jim Washington. I reckon there'll be a change at Piccadilly by the time another year turns round. Pity there ain't a better poor-house in the county. Some white folks'll be going there soon."

The noisy closing of the door caused the speaker to rotate on his axis, and Colonel Washington beheld the sooty visage of the Reverend Mably.

An embarrassed silence fell as the master of Piccadilly advanced, flushed and frowning.

Mamie Ann, a supercilious smile twitching her lips, made a show of placing the letters, neatly tied in a bundle, in the mail sack.

"Hold on there, Mamie Ann," cried the colonel, feeling his

first obligation was to the letter in his hand. "Don't lock that bag. Here's a letter that's got to go out by the mail to-day."

"Who are you addressing?" Mamie Ann demanded, as she stared coldly at the colonel. "If you are speaking to me, I'll remind you that my name is Mrs. Dandridge."

"Mrs. Fiddlesticks," said the angry colonel. "You know as well as I do that white folks don't Mr. and Mrs. colored folks down here. We call them by their first names, as we always have."

He turned to the Reverend Mably and his auditors.

"You people ought to be ashamed to make this post-office your loafing place. Ladies and gentlemen have to come in here and they don't want to hear their private business garbled by a parcel of ignorant gossips who should be out working in the fields where they belong. Don't any of you worry about Piccadilly. That's my concern, not yours. And one word more. We mayn't have a very good poor-house in this county, but, thank God, we've got a pretty good jail."

As he spoke he moved toward the door. At the door he paused.

"You, Mamie Ann," he called back. "Don't you neglect to get that letter off to-day. It's an important letter, and I, for one, won't stand any nonsense from you."

And the colonel gave the door a hearty slam as he departed.

"Mrs. Fiddlesticks," Mamie Ann repeated with rising indignation. "Mrs. Fiddlesticks. I'm Mamie Ann, but he's Colonel Washington, of course. Well, we'll see about that."

"Did you listen at what he said to me, Sister Dandridge?" queried the Reverend Mably. "Ought to be out working in the fields where we belongs. They ain't got a very good poor-house, but they got a pretty good jail. No white man ain't got no business talking to a colored gentleman like that. 'Deed he ain't."

"Who-all's Jim Washington been a-writing to now?" one of the loungers asked.

"It ain't his writing," the postmistress said, as she took the

letter and examined it. "It's Virginia Beverley's writing. It's to Watt Beverley in Baltimore."

"To Watt Beverley in Baltimore," the man echoed. "'Deed he seemed mighty anxious to get it in the mail bag."

"Then he ought to have got it here in time," said Mamie Ann. "Once I get the mail made up I don't open it for any white trash. I'm working for Uncle Sam, not for Jim Washington, and the sooner he knows it the better. If he comes around again calling me Mamie Ann I'll order him out so quick he won't know what's happened. There's no need for us colored ladies and gentlemen to take any of Jim Washington's impudence."

As she spoke she closed and locked the mail bag. Then she tossed Mrs. Beverley's letter indifferently into an open drawer.

That evening at Piccadilly Mrs. Beverley got out the family bank book and placed the five one-thousand-dollar bills between its pages, securing them with a stout rubber band. Then the bank book was placed in Mrs. Beverley's black leather hand-bag, which in its turn was placed for safe keeping beneath her pillow. She passed a restless night, often slipping her hand under the pillow to assure herself that the bag with its precious contents was still there. But a clear morning and brilliant sunshine dispelled her anxiety.

Mrs. Washington, observing her sister's wistful face across the breakfast table, declared she wished the colonel or one of the boys might go to Baltimore with Sister Jinny. But Mrs. Beverley was sure she was quite equal to the responsibility Brent's vanity had imposed upon her.

"If I were carrying those notes, Cousin Jinny," Miss Page said, as she assisted Mrs. Beverley into the carriage, "I certainly should put them in my shoe or in my stocking. I'll feel uneasy every single minute until you are safe at home again. It's just tempting Providence to carry such a sum right in your hands like that. Indeed it is."

"I shall be very careful," Mrs. Beverley said, as she held the little black bag tightly. "I mean to take Cousin James'

advice and ask the captain to lock the money in his safe to-night. And Watt will be waiting for me at the wharf to-morrow morning. I'll have no trouble. Watt won't let me out of his sight until the money is in the bank, you may be sure of that."

"Give my love to the girls and Watt. We shall all be so glad when you are back," Mrs. Washington called as the carriage moved away.

"Yes, give our love to the girls, and tell them—"

But Mrs. Beverley caught no more. She waved her hand; Miss Page and Mrs. Washington fluttered their handkerchiefs, the young Washingtons gave a shout and Mrs. Beverley was off through the bright summer morning toward Weyanoke Landing.

CHAPTER XXIX

TROUBLE AT THE POST-OFFICE

There was the usual exchange of cordial greetings with friends and neighbors at the landing, followed by the familiar but always interesting pageant of the incoming steamer with its flying ropes, its tugging hausers and its churning wheels. Colonel Washington, who had escorted Mrs. Beverley on board and explained her mission to the sympathetic captain, cut short his words of caution and adieus and hurried toward the gangplank. As he set foot upon the wharf he came face to face with Old Henrietta, closely followed by Hamp Sam.

"You going too, Hetty?" cried the colonel. "Looks as if every one was traveling to-day. Who's going to look after Lorella while you and Hamp are away?"

"Lorella she's in the Lord's hands," Old Henrietta answered as she crossed the gangplank and vanished in the gloom of the lower regions of the boat.

As the ropes were cast off and the boat swung away, something gripped the colonel's throat as his eyes still held the slender black-clothed figure in their vision.

"Jinny always was a brave girl," he thought, "but Watt should have stayed at home to attend to this."

When Mrs. Beverley encountered Old Henrietta and Hamp Sam on a lower deck, she stopped for a moment to speak to them and to ask for Lorella.

"'Deed, Miss Jinny," the old woman began. "'Deed I believes Lorella's heard the call. She's a-standing at the edge of Jordan and the Lord's a-waiting on the other side a-beckoning for her to come across. Yes, she's heard the call, but she doan' want to go."

Mrs. Beverley tried to encourage a more hopeful point of view. Hamp listened attentively and with deep respect; but his mother's furtive eyes sought and sought again the black bag in her hands.

Four days later Colonel Washington met Mrs. Beverley with Watt and Ada and Agnes at Weyanoke Landing on their return from Baltimore. Mrs. Beverley looked pale and ill; there were deep circles about her eyes, and her hand trembled noticeably as Watt gave her his arm across the gangplank.

"Why, Jinny, what on earth's the matter?" asked the colonel. "There wasn't any trouble in Baltimore about the money, was there? I've been anxious every minute since you've been away."

"Mother's letter never reached Watt," Ada said.

"His mother's letter never reached him?" cried her uncle. "But I posted it myself."

"Of course, we know you posted it," said Watt, "but it never reached me; mother had to wait from the time the boat got in until the bank opened. And then she had to find her way alone with all that money in her bag; and after she'd been to the bank she took the wrong street-car and got lost and never got out to Aunt Lucy's till after two o'clock."

"There's something very strange about that letter of your mother's not reaching you," the colonel said again.

"All we thought about was getting back to Piccadilly as quickly as we could," said Ada. "So yesterday, when mother felt a little stronger, we packed her up and called a cab and drove down to the boat in state and here we are."

"I might have stayed a day or two longer to do the shopping," Agnes said, "but mother wouldn't hear to it."

"I'm afraid I disarranged everybody's plans," Mrs. Beverley said, with a wan attempt to smile. Tears came quickly to her eyes. "But the one good thing is," she added eagerly, "I did deposit the money safely in the bank."

"I can't understand about that letter," said the colonel. "I got it in the office in plenty of time. I reckon I'd better have a word with Mamie Ann about it."

That afternoon Colonel Washington's carriage again raised the heavy dust on its way back to Weyanoke Cross Roads. The equipage halted before the post-office. The hour of Mamie Ann's reckoning had struck.

As he pushed his way through a group of negroes near the open door the colonel saw that Mr. Braxton had just turned away from the little window behind which Mamie Ann presided.

"Glad to see you, sir," said the colonel, shaking hands. "Yes, Mrs. Beverley and the children got back from Baltimore to-day. Just stop a moment, and then I'll drive you over to the rectory. I want to have a talk with you."

Then advancing upon Mamie Ann, who remained firmly entrenched behind her fortifications of wood and glass, he said:

"See here, Mamie Ann, you recollect I posted a letter the day before Mrs. Beverley took the boat for Baltimore. That letter should have reached Mr. Watt before his mother got to Baltimore. It didn't reach him and its failure to do so caused Mrs. Beverley great distress and anxiety. What I want to know is this: did you put that letter in the mail bag? If you didn't, then I want an explanation."

"And if you don't get your explanation, Jim Washington, what will you do about it? That's what I'd like to know," Mamie Ann cried defiantly.

"I'm not here to answer your questions," said the colonel sternly. "I'm here to have you answer mine. I'm going to learn what happened to that letter or I'm going to know the reason why."

"The United States Government doesn't keep me here to answer your questions. I don't know what you're talking about, and if I did I wouldn't tell you. There's the door."

"That's enough," said the colonel. "We've put up with a good deal from you, but we won't put up with this."

"Oh, you won't, won't you?" Mamie Ann replied. "Don't think you're dealing with a helpless woman. I've got the government behind me, and what's more I've got Colonel Joseph Macie, of Brentwood, and Doctor J. C. Brent, of Co-

morn Hall, and I've got my brother, Mr. Sam Adriance, of Richmond, and I've got his paper, too. You'd better look out how you make threats around here."

"You'll be out of this post-office in less than a week's time," the colonel answered, as he departed with his head in the air and Mr. Braxton in his wake.

While Colonel Macie had nominally controlled the destinies of the post-office the situation had been accepted as one more of the unpleasant consequences of the late war. It was easier to complain than to protest, and the matter had drifted as such matters were wont to drift in Northmoreland County.

But when it suddenly ceased to be a survival of the dead war issues and became a living fact in the great race problem, the community awoke and took action with an alacrity which astonished itself quite as much as it disconcerted Mamie Ann.

A public meeting was held in the little schoolhouse; heated speeches were made by angry gentlemen whose wives had been addressed by their given names because they declined to call the postmistress "Mrs. Dandridge."

Tales were told of letters placed in Mamie Ann's own hands which never reached their destination, and of letters destined for the Cross Roads which never were received.

Five-sixths of the letters either posted or received at Weyanoke, said Judge Beckford, were written by or were addressed to white persons, yet the post-office room was habitually crowded with negroes who loitered there seeming to feel themselves the masters of the situation.

There could be no denying, said the judge, that Mamie Ann had an insolent tongue; a hundred instances could be cited in support of such a statement. Only the other day Mrs. Beckford, to illustrate from his own family, had said when she returned from the Cross Roads, "that she had taken the last piece of impudence from Mamie Ann Dandridge that she was going to take. She wouldn't submit to her abominable insolence any longer."

The judge also understood that Jake Yuttsy's wife had expressed herself freely upon the subject, and had indeed gone so far as to threaten to slap Mamie Ann if she wasn't more respectful, and he had heard one lady of the highest respectability, a lady well known to them all for her Christian character and thoughtful moderation of speech, say emphatically it was a pity Mrs. Yuttsy hadn't done it.

The meeting broke up after appointing a committee to notify Mamie Ann Dandridge that she was unsatisfactory to the community, and that her immediate resignation would be the best solution of the problem.

If she refused to resign charges of gross misconduct in the administration of her office would be lodged against her, and as these could readily be substantiated, her removal was assured.

The committee of notification was composed of Colonel Washington, Judge Beckford, Doctor Carniel and Doctor Bibby. Doctor Bibby's appointment having been particularly requested by Doctor Carniel.

After having openly sided with Doctor Carniel at the meeting which had censured the conduct of the Macies in regard to Miss Constance, Doctor Bibby had been fiercely attacked by Miss Bessie, who had taken resentful note of his changed allegiance. The feud had been carried so far, and had been prosecuted so venomously by Miss Bessie that Doctor Bibby had been glad to give up his house near Burnt Quarter and remove to a little cottage at the Cross Roads.

It had been necessary for Doctor Carniel to throw all his influence in Doctor Bibby's favor, to call him in consultation, and to aid him by every means in his power, to prevent the young physician from being literally starved out.

Any one was liable to make a mistake, said the old doctor, he'd made plenty of them in his time; but after all it took something of a man to get up in a public meeting and admit he had been wrong. Bibby had tried his patience about as far as it had ever been tried, but he had acknowledged his

mistake, and so far as it lay in his power to do so he was ready to forget and forgive. How much more he did no one but Doctor Bibby and Doctor Bibby's wife ever knew.

Doctor Bibby had no particular relish for the honor of serving on the committee of notification, but as Doctor Carniel had insisted on his acceptance he felt obliged to comply.

Mamie Ann, getting wind of these proceedings, sent in hot haste not only for Colonel Macie but for Doctor Brent. Her champions were already at the post-office when the committee arrived.

At the door, the step of Colonel Washington's carriage detached itself from the body of the vehicle as the colonel placed his ample weight upon it.

"There," said the colonel. "Blamed if that step ain't off again, and my shin scraped into the bargain. One moment, gentlemen, till I find a stone and pound it back where it belongs. That's the third time this summer it's come off. It's hard to break a habit once it's formed," and the colonel began searching in the sandy road for a stone of size sufficient to serve the purpose of a hammer.

"If I'm not mistaken there's a loose brick under my front steps," said Doctor Carniel. "Hold on till I get it."

"Just the thing," said the colonel.

Judge Beckford looked on much amused.

"And there's Jake Yutsy's shop across the road," he said, "but Jim Washington always did love to tinker."

Presently Mr. Yutsy, attracted by the sound of hammering, joined the group about the carriage.

"Don't you come over here thinking you're going to get a job," called the colonel as he sighted Mr. Yutsy. He held the brick aloft. "Doctor Carniel's prescribed for it already."

Upon Mr. Yutsy's intimation that he added his presence to the gathering in a purely social capacity the colonel admitted him to the freemasonry of the roadside. A consultation followed. A heated argument followed the consultation. Anecdotes followed the argument. General conversation of an

agreeable nature followed the anecdotes. The time passed pleasantly.

Doctor Bibby, eager to get the disagreeable proceedings over, at last turned to Judge Beckford.

"What are we waiting for?" he asked with some impatience.

"We are waiting, sir," Judge Beckford answered with emphasis which was as chilling as it was unmistakable, "for Colonel Washington to lead the way."

"Oh," said Doctor Bibby, and stepped back.

"No ceremony, gentlemen, no ceremony," cried the colonel, letting fall the brick as he bustled forward.

"We prefer to follow our leader," Judge Beckford answered.

"Then we ought to follow you," laughed the colonel as he led the way inside.

As the committee passed the door it was met by Colonel Macie, who attempted to dissuade the gentlemen from their purpose.

Mrs. Dandridge, he was sure, was perfectly competent, and was making an excellent, trustworthy and efficient postmistress. She had been, perhaps, a little hasty, a little over sensitive; and there had been, he knew, some friction, but he was certain if the gentlemen would not force the issue that matters would run on more smoothly in the future. He had a high opinion of Mrs. Dandridge, and he was sure they had misjudged her.

"Well, if you think so highly of her why don't you take her down to Brentwood? I understand your wife is looking for a servant. Now's your chance to get a good one," Doctor Carniel remarked significantly, and the carpetbagger held his peace.

Somewhat to the surprise of the gentlemen of the committee Doctor Brent was silent. He listened attentively to all that was said, but made no comment.

For her part Mamie Ann boldly denied all wrongdoing. She complained bitterly that she was being persecuted because of her race, and ended by informing the gentlemen of the com-

mittee that she had already sent in her resignation to the authorities at Washington with a full statement of her reasons for resigning. This course, she told them, she had taken on Doctor Brent's advice.

Upon hearing this the colonel and his associates assured Mamie Ann that they had nothing further to say, that if she was acting in good faith, and would give up her office as soon as a successor could be named, they would make no formal charges against her.

"I hope you-all will remember," Mamie Ann could not resist saying as the gentlemen of the committee turned to go, "I hope you-all will remember that if this office is closed you will have no one to blame for it but yourselves."

"By thunder," said the colonel as he tested the troublesome step of his carriage, "I wouldn't be a bit surprised if old man Macie and that yellow woman and Julius Cæsar between them don't try to make a race issue out of this rumpus. That nigger kept too quiet to please me."

Colonel Washington's misgivings were not without foundation. The next morning Mamie Ann did not open the post-office. She refused to receive the incoming mail and the mail sack was returned to the boat unopened. Weyanoke went without its letters.

A telegram from Brent, who scented fresh fields of notoriety, brought Bamford once more to the scene of action, and an affair which would have received scant attention from the authorities in Washington was suddenly blazoned in all the papers of the North and Doctor J. C. Brent was again lauded as the champion of his race.

The man who had stood like a rock for the abolition of Jim Crowism in the church and in the school now stood forth, said Bamford in his press despatches, as the champion of fair play for the powerless, inoffensive little postmistress who was being driven from her humble office by the persecution of the influential white citizens of the region.

An effort was made to deny and gloss over Mamie Ann's insolent and irregular conduct, and to make her appear a vic-

tim of race prejudice. A gross injustice had been done a gentle, kindly, harmless woman merely because her skin was brown.

Mamie Ann's brother, Samuel Adriance, beat the drum of discontent in his paper, the *Richmond Trumpet*, and clamored noisily for justice for his sister. The leading articles of the negro papers throughout the land rang once more with the name of J. C. Brent of Comorn Hall. What was Doctor Brent going to do about this, more than one negro editor asked in the columns of his paper.

The matter attracted the attention of the country.

A presidential election was in sight. An august personage was seeking the support of the negro vote; a little playing to the galleries therefore was in order. It could do no harm and it might be useful in certain closely contested northern states.

Cabinet meetings were called, and the post-office at Weyanoke was ordered closed until the benighted residents of Northmoreland County should come to a realizing sense of the blessings of a free government. The fate of the little Tidewater office had suddenly become of importance to the two political parties soon to be contending in all the heat and passion of a great campaign.

On the one hand the party in power insisted that in closing the post-office at Weyanoke the president had merely administered a much needed lesson to the haughty aristocrats of the South, and by so doing had maintained not only the rights of the negro but the majesty of the government.

On the other hand the political opponents of the president insisted that his act was as needless as it was arbitrary, that it was without precedent, unconstitutional, high-handed, autocratic, tactless and highly insulting to the sovereign state of Virginia.

In ten days the little post-office at Weyanoke had become of national importance. Northmoreland County was making history again, and again the figure of Brent threw a shadow across the land.

When events had reached this stage of development Colonel

Washington and Judge Beckford were requested by their fellow citizens to visit Washington and lay their version of the case before the post-office authorities. Their departure occasioned no little stir.

In the midst of the excitement a letter reached Comorn Hall, by way of Broken Banks, requesting Doctor Brent's presence in Washington at his earliest convenience to lay before the postmaster general his version of the case of Mrs. M. A. Dandridge.

It was known that Mamie Ann had already proceeded to Washington, there to be joined by her brother, Samuel Adriance, to make her statement to the authorities.

Coming as he did in response to the invitation of the postmaster general, Brent's appearance in Washington was a matter of immediate interest to the administration. The day and hour of his arrival, as well as the time set for the conference, were given out at the department with the result that when the *Powhatan* ran in at the foot of Seventh Street a group of reporters had assembled on the wharf, their pencils sharpened and their cameras focused.

Among the reporters Brent's eye at once distinguished the towering form of Bishop Comfort. At the bishop's side stood Mrs. Comfort, a handsome, matronly mulatto, richly dressed, her face heavily powdered, and her handkerchief redolent of perfume.

"There's Bishop Comfort, Molly," Brent said to his wife, who had accompanied him from Comorn. "That must be Mrs. Comfort with him. You don't suppose those men are reporters waiting for me, do you? Yes," he added as he observed the group more closely. "The bishop is pointing us out to them. Well, I'm ready for them. They won't catch me napping."

Bishop Comfort was the first to shake hands with Brother Brent and Sister Brent. He then presented Sister Comfort and explained that they had come to the wharf to take the travelers directly to their own home. There had been a canvass of the principal hotels, the bishop told them, made by an

enterprising young reporter when Brent's coming had first been announced, and the result, printed in the morning paper, had caused the bishop and his wife to hurry down to meet the boat. The bishop was determined that no hotel should have an opportunity to refuse admittance to Doctor J. C. Brent and wife of Comorn Hall. Not while he could help it.

He then introduced the reporters, and leaving them to deal with Brother Brent, turned to add his fluent talk to the somewhat halting conversation of Sister Brent and Sister Comfort.

Brent beamed upon the reporters. He had an instinctive feeling that they were on his side; that they viewed him as Bamford viewed him, as a picturesque figure, as a dramatic personality, and that right or wrong his ideas would make good copy. The people wanted to know about him and Brent was more than willing their wish should be indulged.

"Trouble down the river?" he threw back in answer to a half-caught question. "Well, nothing very serious," he believed the reports had been exaggerated. Yes, a public meeting had been held and perhaps some wild talk had been indulged in. Bitter feeling? He didn't think it should be put that way. Just a little misunderstanding by his white friends and neighbors of the needs and aims of the colored people, their old slaves and servants; just a little injustice in this case of his good friend Mrs. Dandridge. Nothing that should have surprised them. Indeed, they were at fault not to have foreseen what would follow her appointment. The trouble had held off longer than they had any right to expect. One side was as much to blame as the other; one for forgetting too quickly; the other for remembering too long. No. No. He wasn't blaming any one. It took time to do all things, and his neighbors, gentlemen he had respected and admired and looked up to as a boy, why, they had lagged behind a little, that was all. Not voluntarily, perhaps, but when the purse is empty opportunities for travel and a comprehensive view of life were none too many. Narrow opportunities made narrow thoughts. Failure always embitters. He regretted very much to learn that his old friends Colonel Washington and Judge

Beckford, gentlemen who represented all that was best in the traditions of the old South, should have been met with so cold a reception when they stepped from the shadow land of the past in which they dwelt with their memories, into the broad daylight of the vital present. He feared that the language and ideas of twenty or thirty years ago could not be intelligible to the ear of Washington to-day, at least not to the ear of power. And then they hadn't any case. No, really no case at all. Nothing but their prejudice to offer in evidence against the brave little woman with the brown skin who had been their faithful public servant ever since she took over the office on her husband's death.

Progress for the negro race? Did he champion it? Yes. Yes. Progress for the negro and progress for his white brother. The inter-marriage of the races? "Why, yes, gentlemen; yes, I suppose so. This, gentlemen, is my wife; my best answer to that question. This is the lady who does me the honor to bear my name, and sit at the head of my table at Comorn Hall. No. No. You can't interview Mrs. Brent. She doesn't talk for publication, do you, Molly?"

Mrs. Brent smiled coldly upon the young men of the press, and let Mrs. Comfort and the bishop draw her away to the shelter of a carriage which was in waiting to take them to the bishop's house. She was painfully conscious of the cameras leveled at her. Brent followed more deliberately; not unmindful of the cameras, he paused for a last impressive word with a reporter at his elbow. The bishop stood back and let the great man enter the carriage, he followed and the carriage rolled away. A deep complacency sat upon every countenance save Mrs. Brent's. She was wondering how she should live through the days she must spend as a guest in the home of a negro.

A long conference with the post-office authorities followed the next morning. It was half past eleven o'clock when the postmaster general rose and said the president had sent word he wished to see Doctor Brent and hear from him exactly what had taken place at Weyanoke.

The president! The blood surged to Brent's head. He was to meet the president of the United States. A miracle had occurred with all the ease of the commonplace. A message had been received over the telephone. He took up his hat and accompanied by two or three gentlemen he was on his way to the White House.

He remembered a spacious vestibule, a large office of some dignity, at which he had only time to glance when a door opened and he was ushered into the presence of the president.

Spread out on the desk before the president was a copy of a morning paper; a picture of Brent adorned its first page. The panic and turmoil in the negro's soul was followed by a great calm. Even here his glory had preceded him. His success was so colossal, his fame so assured, so signally and so quickly won, that he seemed now to stand aside and view it all impersonally.

Nothing finer could be conceived than the simple, benignant dignity of his manner throughout the interview which followed. He heard quick kind questions; he was conscious of a brilliant mentality which met him quite half-way, which was predisposed to think well of him and to attach importance to his words, and of a frank hearty manner which put him perfectly at ease.

That for a time he spoke through a mental haze, to his listeners only conveyed the impression that his utterance was the deliberate expression of the convictions of one who weighs his words. He spoke with great respect of his neighbors, Colonel Washington and Judge Beckford, with deep regret of the misunderstandings which had grown up between his people, the negroes, and their former masters.

He reviewed the case of the post-office with a show of fairness which might well have deceived one less prejudiced in his favor than his distinguished auditor. Passing from matters of fact to generalizations upon the race question, a topic of great interest to his keen and attentive listener, he spoke with all the authority and wide range of his recent reading, his eloquence and dignity adding impressiveness to his words.

For the moment he completely enthralled and captivated his hearers. Not the least element in his favor was the picturesque fact that here before them was an ex-slave, now master in his master's house, now lord of the broad acres he had once helped to till. This handsome, suave and courtly gentleman with the dark skin had been sold by one white man to another. This man had been a runaway slave, followed by bloodhounds, perhaps, captured, half naked and half starved, in a swamp; this benevolent, prosperous gentleman, whose appearance was rather that of a Portuguese noble than a negro, this man with a mind stored with the history of his race, with large and noble hopes for the future of that race, a scholar, a physician, a great landed proprietor, a man of solid wealth, this man had been born and reared in slavery, the absolute property of a white master. It was astonishing.

At last the president rose.

"The war was well fought and well won, which secured freedom to a race which could produce such a man."

The sages at the council table nodded their heads in acquiescence. At this moment a servant entered and luncheon was announced.

Without a moment's hesitation the president turned to Doctor Brent.

"Come, you must join us," he said, and scarcely waiting for a reply led the way to the room where luncheon was served.

The food was excellent. Brent ate heartily, and the easy flow of his talk maintained the spell until all rose from the table.

As the president shook hands at parting he said earnestly:

"I am glad, Doctor Brent, to have your approval of the course which I have taken in this post-office affair. The people have behaved badly to this woman. They shall have ample time to reflect upon their course before the post-office at Weyanoke is reopened. Meanwhile I am sorry that you must be inconvenienced by the delay in receiving your mail. Above all I am glad to have met a man who by his own effort has solved the race question. Any race that can produce a Doctor

J. C. Brent is entitled to elbow room and fair play in this country, and as far as my power goes, it shall receive it. Don't let me hear of your being in Washington without calling at the White House. I shall need your opinion on many matters concerning both white and black in the South."

Leaving the White House Brent excused himself from the postmaster general and made his way alone on foot to the home of Bishop Comfort.

He might indeed have been walking upon air for all the sense of asphalt and of stone beneath his feet. Arrived at the bishop's door he mounted the steps slowly, almost softly. He was rolling it all under his tongue. He was gloating over it all. He was wrapping his soul in the warmth of his own importance. Glory was upon his brow.

Bishop Comfort himself opened the door. A hum of voices came from the parlor.

"Here you are at last, Brother Brent," said the bishop. "Some brothers and sisters have come in to pay their respects to you and the madame. We certainly thought you were lost. It's after two o'clock."

"Has Brother Brent had any luncheon?" Mrs. Comfort called from the parlor, full of hospitable solicitude. "We waited an hour and then we gave you up. The girl can bring it all back. She's kept it warm for you, Brother Brent."

Brent did not reply immediately. He made his way quietly, almost humbly, into the midst of the circle about his wife in the parlor. He paused beneath the chandelier.

"You'd better have the girl set a fresh place for Brother Brent," the bishop urged.

"Now don't you trouble about me, Bishop; don't you trouble about me, Sister Comfort," Brent said in gentle protest. "I've had my luncheon."

"Now, Doctor," cried Sister Comfort. "Now, Sister Brent. Bishop, is he telling us the truth? He just thinks it will be a trouble to the girl. Cora," she called, moving to the door at the head of the basement stairs, "Cora, do you hear me? Bring the things right up again for Doctor Brent." Return-

ing to the parlor she once more appealed to Brent. "Where'd you have your luncheon? You ask him, Bishop," she urged hospitably.

"Where did you eat, Brother Brent?" the bishop persisted. "Gentlemen of color don't get served in our best restaurants."

"I had my luncheon at the White House with several other gentlemen," Brent answered simply. "I would have excused myself when the president asked me to stay if I had thought Sister Comfort would wait luncheon for me. I wouldn't have inconvenienced Sister Comfort for anything, and the president would not have wanted me to do so."

CHAPTER XXX

DOCTOR BRENT VISITS ALEXANDRIA

A bell rang. Steps hurried through the hall. The outer door was opened. An emissary of the press to see Doctor Brent. There was a flurry of intense excitement in the parlor. The bishop directed that the reporter be taken to his study. Doctor Brent excused himself and followed closely.

"A gentleman to see me?" he asked, as he entered the study.

"Say a reporter and I'm it," laughed the young news-gatherer.

"The same thing, the same thing to me," said Brent, shaking hands cordially. He liked young men, particularly he liked reporters. "Yes, indeed, I remember meeting you at the wharf yesterday. I don't get interviewed so often that I am likely to forget it. What can I do for you to-day, sir? How's that? It's all over town that I had luncheon at the White House with the president? An unusual occurrence? Here, perhaps; but not in Canada, where I have spent so many years. My errand at the White House? Just to tell what I knew about the Weyanoke post-office affair. My opinion of the president? Certainly. Undoubtedly one of the greatest men of modern times; a man keenly alive to the interests of my people; a man with a mind wide open to receive impressions; no dweller in the past, a man abreast and ahead of his time; a man who is throwing his shadow into the future; a fearless man. But I don't think there is any occasion to mention the president's hospitality to me in the columns of your paper. You want to hear about the big negro convention which is to assemble in Washington next week? Does it interest me? Yes, very deeply. It has been called together by Bishop Comfort and other leaders, to con-

sider the present condition of our race in America, and to devise means of bettering our social and political status. Am I to remain for the convention? Well, it's likely that I shall stay over. No, no, nothing further about the president, nor my luncheon at the White House. I won't say anything more than that my visit to Washington has been extremely satisfactory."

Again, Brent realized, his destiny was with him. A trivial occurrence, because of the color of his skin and his growing notoriety, had become a matter of national importance. The press of the country fastened tenaciously upon the fact that a negro had sat at the president's table and had broken his bread. Far and wide rolled the controversy thus evoked. Sides were taken with passionate vehemence; epithets were hurled. Brent's name became as well known throughout the land as though he had been the president himself, or the latest sensational murderer, the greatest actor on earth, or the most advertised biscuit on the market.

The negro convention of which the reporter had spoken was to assemble in Washington the following week: hundreds of delegates would be present, representing the negroes of every state in the Union. So important was the event that the administration took note of it and a cabinet minister had been deputed to deliver the address of welcome on the opening night.

From the day of his arrival Bishop Comfort had urged upon Brent the advisability of remaining to attend the meeting. It was but human that, having a lion of the first magnitude under his roof, the bishop desired to make him roar.

Brent, said the bishop, was looming large on the horizon as one of the marked men of his race; he could easily become one of the most influential. His mere presence at the convention would be certain to arouse vast enthusiasm.

Gratified by these arguments, Brent readily agreed to remain and Bishop Comfort arranged that his guest should deliver the principal address of the evening.

Fully aroused to the importance of the occasion, Brent set

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to work to prepare his speech, while Mrs. Brent resigned herself to a continuance of the offensive hospitalities of Bishop and Sister Comfort with the best grace she could summon.

On the Thursday preceding the momentous occasion Bishop Comfort was invited to address a meeting of his race in Alexandria. The bishop, however, laboring for the success of the convention, found his hands so full that he proposed that Doctor Brent should speak in his place. The committee which had waited upon the bishop accepted this suggestion with delight. Brent readily agreed, and on the day appointed set out for Alexandria accompanied by Mrs. Brent.

The Brents made an early start, intending to go to Mount Vernon by trolley and stop at Alexandria on their return. They drove to the station, where Brent purchased his tickets. Two ordinary street-cars, coupled together, were waiting on the track. The rear car being evidently the smoker, Brent directed his wife to the forward car just as the gong sounded its warning. The cars were in motion as he followed Mrs. Brent well to the front and took one of the few seats which remained vacant.

Soon after the car had rolled out of the station the conductor came through to collect the tickets. He glanced at Brent closely, and then at Mrs. Brent. A curious smile settled about his closely shaven lips, but he accepted the tickets which Brent gave him without comment, tore off a part of each, and returning them to Brent, moved on to the next passenger.

A few minutes later as the car crossed the bridge over the Potomac the conductor reappeared from the smoker and made his way forward. The laws of the District of Columbia, making no distinction between the races, it was only after they had entered Virginia that the Jim Crow regulations could be enforced.

The conductor leaned over Brent's shoulder.

"Very sorry," he said, "but the law of Virginia requires that all colored persons shall occupy seats at the rear of these cars. I've got to trouble you to move."

As he spoke many glances were directed toward Brent by his fellow passengers. A fat man, who had seen Brent's picture in a newspaper, whispered to a friend: "That must be the rich nigger doctor from down the river; the man that's been mixed up in the Weyanoke post-office row."

"You've got to trouble me to move?" Brent repeated, staring up at the conductor. "What's that you say? Were you addressing me?"

The conductor repeated his words, this time a little louder. The fat man laughed. Brent bristled.

"So this is one of your Jim Crow regulations, is it, that I have heard so much about?"

"It's the law of the State of Virginia," the conductor said with blunt finality.

"Well, it doesn't apply to me," Brent answered, settling himself deeply and comfortably in his seat. "I've paid my fare. You've taken my ticket. I'm entitled to a seat and I'm going to keep this one."

"I'm sorry," the conductor repeated, "but the law makes no exceptions. Colored people can't sit in these seats. They're reserved for white people. You'd better take a seat in the rear."

"Do you know who you are talking to, young man?" Brent demanded, his voice rising angrily. "You can't insult respectable people like this, dictating where they shall and where they shall not sit in a public conveyance. It's outrageous."

"Come, Julius," Mrs. Brent interposed, laying a restraining hand upon her husband's arm. "Come, let us take the seats at the end of the car." As Mrs. Brent spoke she rose.

"Those seats are not for you, madam," the conductor said. "Only colored persons can sit in them. The law works both ways."

Brent turned upon the gentleman with anger flaming in his face.

"Do you mean to tell me," he cried, "that I can't sit in this car in the same seat with my own wife?"

"I only wished to save the lady embarrassment," the con-

ductor replied. "The law provides separate seats for the races in Virginia."

"I am proud to call myself a negro," said Brent, "but legally I am a white man. In any case I will not move. You may be able to bully poor ignorant colored people down here, but you can scarcely hope to succeed with me. What if I refuse to leave my seat?"

"That's easy. You'll be arrested for violating the Jim Crow law when we run into Alexandria."

"Very well, that's easy, too," said Brent. "Let them arrest me. I absolutely refuse to change my seat."

The sounds of altercation had brought several of the occupants of the smoker to the door of the car in which Brent sat. Among those loyal Virginians there was some talk of "throwing the nigger off," but the wiser passengers counseled patience, and nothing was done to disturb Brent and his wife.

At Arlington Junction the conductor swung himself to the ground and entering the station called up the office at Alexandria.

"Hello, is that you, Dick? Say, this is Charlie. I got a coon on this car so high-toned he won't sit where he belongs. A coon, I said. Yes, a coon. You have a cop on the corner of Royal and King Streets. No, I ain't meddling with him. Some of the boys wanted to throw him off, but we ain't touched him. There's a white woman with him, so I didn't want any trouble. The coon who had his dinner at the White House? Say, Dick, the soup must have gone to his head. So long. Look out for us when we come by."

"You sit still, Molly, and don't you worry," Brent said in an undertone. "They can't do anything but fine me, and there will be plenty of people in Alexandria to go on my bond if that's necessary." Aloud he could not refrain from expressing his indignation that a lady and gentleman could be subjected to such treatment within plain sight of the capital of the United States. They seemed to have forgotten down here that Lee had surrendered. He wondered what the president would say to this.

"You are in the State of Virginia now," a fellow passenger replied, "and it doesn't matter in the least what your friend the president would say, or what he thinks. He has his way of treating negroes and we have ours."

"Some like one way an' some like the other," observed a dejected wreck of a poor white who had drifted in from the smoker. "'Most everybody down this-a-way don't think a nigger has no business into a white man's dining-room unless he's got a napkind over his arm an' is stepping lively to pass the vittles. Yes, sir, speak when you're spoken to, come when you're called, that's the golden rule we go by in dealing with niggers down this-a-way."

Mrs. Brent, who was enduring a very anguish of mortification, almost feared to look at her husband. When, however, she did summon courage to do so, to her surprise all trace of anger had vanished from his face.

His lips were set firmly in a grim smile of triumph. Again destiny was busy in his behalf. The moment might be bitterly humiliating, but his compensation was certain. Already he was reading the head-lines in the newspapers. Before the car rolled into Alexandria he was completely master of himself and of the situation; benignant, full of calm dignity, only concerned that Mrs. Brent had been exposed to such annoyance. As the car stopped Brent rose, smiling, benevolent, assured. His manner, with its large forbearance and its perfect dignity, rather took the officer who was waiting into the custody of its kindness than submitted to the indignity of arrest. This was not an obstreperous nigger who could be collared and jerked along to the police station for the edification of the crowd. The officer contented himself with acting as Brent's guide rather than his captor.

Brent had scarcely reached the police station when he was surrounded by a group of the most respectable negroes of the town. In half an hour he was in the home of the most prosperous colored man in Alexandria.

Already the wires were busy between Alexandria and Washington conveying detailed accounts of the arrest of Doctor

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J. C. Brent, of Comorn Hall, for refusing to comply with the Jim Crow laws of Virginia. In another hour the wires all over the land were recounting the story of the treatment accorded the president's guest, as Brent was now called, in his native state.

Southern editors ground their teeth and cursed the name of J. C. Brent. Northern editors sharpened their pencils and gave space to the affair out of all proportion to its importance. Here was a bone of contention over which they could wax eloquent from Maine to Florida, from New York to California. And the longer the controversy raged the better it would be for the fame of Doctor J. C. Brent, of Comorn Hall.

That evening every seat in the little church where Brent was to speak was taken, and every available space was occupied. The building was literally packed to the walls, while a crowd of negro men and boys who could not gain admittance hung about the doors and windows, which were thrown wide open that those beyond might see and hear the new champion of equality. There was a glare of gaslight, and the heat promised to become stifling.

Mrs. Brent sat on the platform beside her husband, and before the speechmaking began many men and women with brown or black skins crowded up to shake the hand of the white lady who had stood by the colored gentleman she married.

"Oh, God, ain't it grand to see a white lady with a heart like hers. If the Lord had only made more white folks like Sister Brent, heaven'd be right here in Alexandria, 'deed if it wouldn't. But, bless God, He's give the white folks a pattern to go by, yes, bless God for that, bless God for that!"

When the meeting had been duly called to order the chairman, a hickory-headed ecclesiastic with a bull neck, advanced to introduce the speaker of the evening. The reverend gentleman had a fluent oily flow of oratory which dripped like axle grease in summer from the hub of his ideas. He wanted the colored brothers and sisters of Alexandria to know Brother

Brent. Doctor J. C. Brent, of Comorn Hall, Virginia, didn't need any introduction from him.

He mopped his perspiring forehead and pounded the table before him as he declared he wanted to hear from Brother Brent, they all wanted to hear from Brother Brent, why a man who was good enough to dine with the president of the United States off his own table in the White House wasn't good enough to ride in a front seat in a dirty street-car in the State of Virginia.

Pounding the table until it shook beneath his hand, he said he'd like to get a plain answer to that question from Brother Brent. He wanted to know why the white people couldn't endure a colored person about them any more. Who was changing, the white men or the colored men? Hadn't negro women been the beloved mammies of nearly every white man and woman in the state? Hadn't negro men and women labored for the white people for nearly two hundred years? Yes, my brothers; yes, my sisters, labored without wages. What was the matter with the negro now that he was free? What was the trouble, anyhow? What was it that all at once had made the presence of a negro so unwelcome and distasteful to the white men and women who had grown up, as you might say, in his arms?

Yes, brethren, they all wanted to hear what Doctor J. C. Brent of Comorn Hall had to say to his friends in Alexandria on the subject of equality. There wasn't a man or woman present who didn't know of the insult that had been put upon this distinguished gentleman and his white lady wife in their own town that day. They all knew that at this very moment Brother Brent was only able to meet with them to-night because bail had been furnished for his appearance in the police court in the morning.

Things had come to a pretty pass indeed when a gentleman could not sit quietly in a seat in a public conveyance at the side of his own wife without being insulted, arrested, and taken before a magistrate to be fined, yes, my brothers, yes, my sisters, to be fined as Brother Brent will certainly be fined

to-morrow, and for what? Insulted, arrested, fined, all just because his skin happens to be a little darker than some people like. And this, my brothers and my sisters, right in plain sight of the dome of the capitol of the United States; yes, sir, only six miles from the room where the highest court in the land was sitting when this outrage took place. We pay taxes, but the white folks seem to run the show. Yes, sir, it was time to hear something about equality before the word ceased to have any meaning whatever in this land of liberty at the end of the nineteenth century.

Some people said the light of liberty was spreading, but it looked to him like the torch Abraham Lincoln had kindled was going out. But he wouldn't keep them a minute more; what they wanted was to hear Brother Brent.

He paused. Tramp, tramp, tramp, sounded the approach of men keeping step.

A squad of police paused before the open door of the church. The chairman was called outside. There was a brief parley. The chairman returned to the platform, whispered to Doctor Brent, and turning to face the audience, declared the meeting adjourned till some future occasion.

A hideous outrage had been committed by a negro in the suburbs and the mayor would not be responsible for any negroes found upon the streets that night.

When Brent saw the Washington paper the next morning he found that two columns had been devoted to his arrest. After reading the article carefully he gave the paper to his wife, glanced at his watch and saw that it was time to appear before the magistrate to answer to the charge of violating one of the Jim Crow laws of Virginia.

Leaving the house with his host he found an escort, composed of many of the most respectable negroes of the town, waiting to accompany him to the police court. The magistrate imposed a fine of ten dollars and costs. The fine and costs were immediately subscribed by Brent's negro friends, and Brent was released.

As he turned to leave the court a footman, wearing a

smart livery, advanced from among a group of loungers near the door and handed him an envelope. The envelope bore his name written in a strong dashing hand. Surprised, he broke the seal and read:

Mrs. Delafield presented her compliments to Doctor and Mrs. Brent. Having read in her morning paper of the outrage to which they had been subjected on the day before, and fearing a repetition of the unpleasant occurrence should they attempt to return to Washington by trolley, Mrs. Delafield begged Doctor and Mrs. Brent to do her the honor to accept the use of her carriage when they returned to the city.

An hour later Doctor and Mrs. Brent were being driven out of Alexandria in Mrs. Delafield's perfectly appointed carriage.

When they reached Bishop Comfort's door they found a throng of reporters already in waiting. The news that Mrs. Delafield had sent her carriage to Alexandria for Brent had been telephoned across to Washington and had created almost as great a sensation as the luncheon at the White House.

Some instinct warned Brent that he must not cheapen himself. Circumstances were speaking for him in language more effective than any at his command. Therefore he paused but for a moment to reply to the questions which the reporters put to him.

Yes, he was to speak at the Convention Hall on the following Monday night. He'd been talking so much already that these young fellows must give him a chance to catch his breath. He didn't believe their readers cared to hear so much about him. Any one was welcome to come and listen to him on Monday night, but he didn't believe in exaggerating the importance of what had occurred, or the importance of what he might then have to say. After all he was only one of nine or ten millions who held pretty definite ideas on the same subjects. Mrs. Delafield's carriage? A most kind and considerate act on the part of a great lady. He and his wife were deeply indebted to Mrs. Delafield for her kindness. He got away from the reporters and behind closed doors

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with his host and several of the most distinguished negroes of the country, who had already reached Washington to take part in the convention.

As the latest victim of the odious Jim Crow laws, Brent was regarded as a martyr. Bishop Comfort told of a recent experience, sitting up all night in a day coach, on an evangelical visitation to Alabama, because as a negro, though he carried the word of God to those who thirsted, he could not ride in a sleeping car.

"And there wasn't any grand lady like Mrs. Delafield to send her carriage for me, either. It takes a great lady who knows the inside of every court in Europe to do a thing like that. I want you to thank her for all our people, Brother Brent, when you go to pay her your respects. Yes, sir, she gave our whole race a lift when she sent her carriage across to Alexandria so you shouldn't have to ride in the back seat of their trolley car. She's a great lady, and she knows how to act like one."

As the bishop spoke the door leading to the hall was opened from without.

"Bishop, Bishop," called Mrs. Comfort from the doorway. "Look and see who's come up from Richmond to see Brother Brent and to meet with us in the convention."

"Why, if it isn't Brother Adriance," cried the bishop. "Well, I declare it's good to meet with Brother Adriance. And Sister Dandridge, too." Then, turning to Brent with his most impressive manner, the bishop added: "Brother Brent, I want you to shake the hand of Brother Adriance, the editor of the *Richmond Trumpet*. You two gentlemen must get together. Brother Adriance has been supporting you right along in the columns of the *Trumpet* ever since you began your fight against Jim Crowism in the House of God."

Brent and Adriance shook hands cordially.

"You can't tell me anything about Brother Adriance," Brent said warmly. "We've been in correspondence for nearly a year now. And in any event," he added gallantly, "Mrs. Dandridge's brother and I could not meet as strangers."

Adriance was a man of thirty-five, tall, slender and not unprepossessing in appearance. His features were delicate, his complexion light. What negro blood he possessed was strongly tinged with the blood of his Arab ancestors. He was adroit, skilful, plausible and insinuating; he was bold without courage; ambitious, ease-loving and vain.

From Adriance Brent turned to Adriance's sister, taking the gloved hand which she extended. He was surprised, meeting her in this new environment, to see how well she bore herself. To-day as he looked down into her eyes he thought her very handsome, very alluring. At the moment when Brent's glance fell upon her, Mamie Ann was smiling up at him, her adoring eyes fixed upon his face with an open admiration very like a challenge. Her hand clasped his closely. He could feel it warm and glowing through her glove.

"Doctor Brent is our champion," she said softly. Again she looked up in his eyes with a wistful adoration, released his hand with clinging reluctance, and glided away toward Mrs. Brent, who met her overtures without effusion.

The next day, quite faultlessly dressed, Brent called upon the lady in whose carriage he had returned to Washington. A servant in rich livery took his card and ushered him into the drawing-room. Mrs. Delafield, Brent knew, was no longer a young woman. He was therefore surprised when a tall, willowy figure swept into the room, a figure still girlish despite a certain fulness and grandeur of line. The head was regal in its poise, the face still beautiful, its imperiousness softened by graciousness, the complexion a warm pallor, the hair lustrous and thick, the eyes large and slightly slanting, full of intelligence and interest.

"It is so good of you, Doctor Brent, to steal a moment from your duties and your friends to come to me. My carriage! I am a thousand times repaid by the distinction your use of it has conferred upon me." Smiling, she motioned him to a chair near the one upon which she had seated herself. "The radiance of your fame falls even upon me. It is always so, I

fancy. The lamp of fame, light it where you will, must gild some face at the edge of the circle. Well, your lamp is kindled and its light has reached me for the moment, thanks to the reporters. But I wish to hear you talk. Dining at the White House last night the president told me how delightfully you can talk. I want to know how you came to be in the forefront of the march of these millions of black men toward the real liberty and equality so long denied them. Is it possible, as I have read, and as the president told me, that you once lived as a slave in the house which is now yours? How interesting! How fascinating!"

She looked frankly into his eyes, smiling her invitation to him to open his heart to her. Mrs. Delafield had never been more gracious. She had seldom been more interested.

"Yes," Brent answered, feeling a rich relish for the warmth of her interest. "Yes, I was born a slave, at Brentwood, in Northmoreland County, and I was sold to General Beverley and lived for a time as a house slave at Comorn Hall."

"How utterly incredible! How obsolete to-day are the facts of yesterday!"

He took her meaning with an alertness which surprised her.

"There," he said, "you have touched upon the real difficulty; my real difficulty, at least, in this effort I have made to return to the place where I was born. What I have done has been to return, not so much to Virginia, as to the past. My neighbors will not recognize that the facts of slavery are obsolete to-day. They still measure me by the old standards, they can not separate me from their old traditions, their old prejudices. My people labor in the present but the chains of the past are still heavy upon them. Sometimes I fear I was wrong to go back to Comorn Hall."

"It was noble, a poetic thing to do," said Mrs. Delafield. "I am certain it was your destiny. Great things will come of it. Be assured of that. A different experience would never have developed your true capacity, nor given you this opportunity. A strong man under persecution is soon a strong man roused;

a man of action. On all sides one hears you proclaimed as the new leader of your race. It is a high destiny." She paused, but the enthusiasm of her speech still lingered in her eyes.

"It is a high destiny," he answered, "but it is a cruel destiny."

"Cruel?" she asked. "Why cruel?"

"Because to follow it will cut me off forever from the things I have most valued. If I had remained in Canada the old pleasant life would have gone on. I'd be like any other fairly successful man, with friends about me, white friends, I mean."

"You miss your white friends then?" she asked.

"Yes, I miss them more than I can say. In Montreal a whole year might go by and I'd never once realize that I was different from every one about me. I was known, and I was respected. There was no blight upon my children, no stigma such as now attaches to them in Virginia. And then I went back to Comorn. You don't know what the change has meant to me. It has changed and warped my character. The old wellsprings of my life have dried up and new and bitter ones have formed. In all the time I've been there I've not had one friendly word from a white man whom I respect. Our lives down there are passed under a great shadow of hate; a shadow which will never lift. You don't know these people, if you did you'd understand."

"But I do understand," said Mrs. Delafield. "I know the people among whom you live, at least, I know their kind. My mother was one of the Pages of Virginia. My father was General Hamilton. The war caused great differences in our family. My father and one of my brothers fought in the northern army, another brother who had passed much of his youth in Virginia with my mother's people, and who had been educated at the University of Virginia, fought in the southern army. My father disowned him. As I say, there was great bitterness. My father utterly repudiated all our southern connections, and they have repudiated us absolutely. My brother's son Douglas Hamilton is somewhere in Virginia now, but he never communicates with me."

Brent had risen.

"Was your brother in the southern army, Captain John Page Hamilton, who served for a time on the staff of General Lee?" he asked.

"John Page Hamilton was my brother, and he did serve, I believe, for a time on General Lee's staff. So my brother has told me. My father never spoke his name."

"Then I have seen him," said Brent.

"In Virginia, in war time?" asked Mrs. Delafield.

"In Virginia, but after the war. And in Montreal. I was a medical student in the house of the physician who attended him in his last illness. I first went to Canada as his servant."

"How very strange," said Mrs. Delafield. "How very, very strange you should have known my brother." She was pensive for a moment, then turned, smiling once more, to Brent.

"Promise me that you will not be weak, that you will not cheat destiny, for, believe me, it is destiny which claims you now. You must not question where it will lead so long as it bears you forward; so many follow that if you lead them but a little way the service will be great. No," she said with resolution, "you must not turn back. You must not shrink. A great leader has no choice. He must lead or die."

As she spoke Mrs. Delafield rose. Brent rose also, but he had yet a word to say, a request to make.

"I am to speak at the negro convention on Monday night," he said. "It is a big affair. The hall seats thousands, and they tell me that it will be filled. If I succeed I may feel as you do, that I have a call to lead my people. I have spoken to you very frankly. I had not intended to say what I have said, but, as I have told you, you are the only white person except the president who has shown me any kindness since I came south. It seems it is the successful negro who is most shut out. I am used to white people, to their sympathy, their encouragement; neither I nor my people know how to do without it; we fear, we hesitate, we swing back to the old allegiance only to find the doors closed against us. To-day I've been a negro telling my troubles to a white lady, on Monday night

I'll have to take another attitude. Will you come and hear me, and when it is all over let me see you again?" He paused. "Then you will know what I can do. I will abide by your judgment then."

"I will come gladly," Mrs. Delafield answered, giving him her hand. "But my judgment will remain unchanged. Courage! Success! Be fearless!"

When Mrs. Delafield heard the door close after her visitor, she moved into one of the long windows and was rewarded by a glimpse of Brent as he left the house. She noted his massive shoulders and splendid leonine head; she noted his firm tread, his carriage full of dignity.

It might, she thought, have been the Turkish ambassador leaving her door. She smiled a half wry, half weary smile, lifted her eyebrows, and turned away from the window with a shrug of her beautiful shoulders.

"A negro," she murmured, "in my drawing-room."

But the face which she saw reflected in the tall mirror was flushed and triumphant. She regarded it critically as she repeated to herself, "He must lead or die. Yes, it is quite certain that he must lead or die."

She thought the phrase peculiarly happy. A touch of the sensational was not offensive to her temperament. She had never allowed the great lady to obscure the woman in her; each was so perfect a creation that their relations had always been harmonious, each had heightened the other's charm, forming the wonderful composite the world of fashion knew as Mrs. Delafield.

"How odd," she thought as she ascended the stairs to the library in which she read and wrote. "How odd that he should have known my brother."

On leaving Mrs. Delafield, Brent experienced the same sensation of buoyant elation which he had felt when he left the White House after his meeting with the president. He felt he should surpass himself if he could only see her in the audience when he rose to address the convention. His speech engrossed him. He had made notes. He found himself repeat-

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ing impassioned sentences as he walked homeward. He did not doubt his ability when the time should come. He had a great cause to champion; and he had his own point of view.

At the bishop's he found Mamie Ann Dandridge on the steps, and they entered the house together.

CHAPTER XXXI

BRENT DELIVERS AN ADDRESS

On Monday night Convention Hall was packed to the doors and to the overarching roof which sloped to meet the walls against which the seats were banked, tier upon tier, until they reached the very rafters. Banners were hung from the iron girders which spanned the murk high overhead. On the vast platform flags and flowers brightened the spot where the speaker's table stood. Behind the platform still other tiers of seats, row upon row, rose toward the sloping roof, filled with the choirs which were to sing between the addresses.

Immediately before the platform was the reporters' table. Near this, a tiny oasis in the immense throng of dark-faced men and women, sat Mrs. Delafield and her party.

As Brent, accompanied by Mrs. Brent, appeared upon the platform, Bishop Comfort rose and, waving the audience to its feet, advanced with outstretched hands to meet him. As he did so Brent was recognized by the assembled thousands and a thunder of applause swept through the huge building.

As Brent, conducted by the bishop, seated himself in the place which had been reserved for him near the speaker's table, his eye sought out Mrs. Delafield. It was with a feeling of elation that he saw the stately head and lovely face amidst a group of courtiers and attendants. As their eyes met he rose and bowed profoundly, and again the thunder of applause swept through the hall, the assembly thus paying its tribute to the great lady who had sent her carriage to Alexandria to spare its hero from a second humiliation.

A black bishop from Mississippi pronounced an impressive invocation, the choir sang a hymn of welcome. Bishop Comfort, as chairman of the convention, presented the cabinet

minister who made a brief address, welcoming the delegates to the city, cast a surprised glance in the direction of Mrs. Delafield and her party, and hurried away to a banquet where the only colored persons present would appear as waiters.

Bishop Comfort then presented a well-known negro educator, whose brief remarks were received with respect. A banker followed, speaking sensibly of the economic future of the negro in America, and then Bishop Comfort rose again. He lifted his hand and a hush fell on the multitude.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "the time has now come when it is my privilege to say a few words of one who will speak to-night not only for himself, but for all our race. Ladies and gentlemen, you have all read of Doctor J. C. Brent, of Comorn Hall. You have read of his fearless championship of his race; of his fight in the courts of Virginia to stamp Jim Crowism out of the church, and the Jim Crow laws out of the schools, out of the homes, and out of the hearts of the American people, black and white.

"You know the signal honor conferred upon him by his friend, the president of the United States; you know also of the humiliation to which he was subjected, with his wife, as he was passing through his own state, the state of Jefferson, of Mason, and of Washington. You know how he was arrested for a violation of a Jim Crow law. In the opinion of the speaker, ladies and gentlemen, that outrage may prove a boomerang which will return to smite the hands of those who hurled it. If I could predict I would venture to say that wanton act, that needless indignity, had sounded the death knell of Jim Crow cars and Jim Crow legislation in Virginia, if not in the entire South.

"I will not detain you longer. Eulogy is as unnecessary as detraction would be futile. Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you a man, a scholar, a great landed proprietor, and a leader of our race, all united in the person of our colored brother, Doctor J. C. Brent, of Comorn Hall, the most distinguished son, black or white, which Virginia can boast to-day! Ladies and gentlemen, Doctor Brent was not permitted to speak in

Alexandria, but, thank God, speech is still free in the District of Columbia. Doctor Brent!"

Brent rose slowly from his seat, bowed to Bishop Comfort, and went forward to the speaker's table at the front of the platform. The cheer which had greeted his name now echoed again and again through the hall. Men rose in their places and shouted until they were hoarse, women stood upon seats and waved their handkerchiefs and scarfs and veils, mingling their shriller cries with the voices of the men, and under all rumbled the thunder of the stamping of thousands of heavy feet.

Brent looked over the sea of faces as his soul swam on the great billows of applause and, for the first time in his life, he fully realized what an actual power his race had become in the land of their bondage. Given leadership, who could deny them anything? All their achievement was not in the future, some of it already belonged to the past, much of it was in the present. These were not people to be dismissed with a word, whose hopes and aspirations were forever to be met by the impassable barriers of Jim Crow legislation; people whose highest titles from their white neighbors after a well spent life would be "uncle" or "aunt."

Before him were all sorts and conditions of negro men and women. For the most part he thought them not far removed from the negro of the old days, except in an indescribable sense of emancipation of spirit, which was a different thing from the emancipation of the body.

There was, he recognized, a leaven among them, the almighty minority, which was insensibly raising the standard of the race from year to year, from hour to hour. To this leaven, to the mind of the mighty minority then, Brent would address himself, but now and again he would call forth from the vast audience the terrible thunder of its deep emotions, which should rumble as though great drums were beaten in the sky, ominous and warning. The tramp, tramp of the feet upon the floor held an echo of marching armies.

He stood there, his noble head uplifted, his dark face flooded with the elation of his overflowing soul, erect and masterful, a splendid figure, inspiring to the multitude.

How long the tumult would have lasted no one knew, for presently Brent raised his hand.

"My friends," he said when the tempest had sunk to eager silence as men and women restrained their frantic enthusiasm that they might not lose the slightest word of this new demigod. "My friends," he repeated, speaking in a low but resonant voice which carried to the remotest corners of the hall, "I have been asked to speak to you to-night on the importance of racial equality. God seems to have selected this great new continent of ours as the theater where mankind shall achieve true brotherhood. We live in a land dedicated to freedom and broad tolerance; to religious freedom, to the freedom of the press, to freedom in all its forms save only racial freedom. It is for racial freedom that we now contend; for the emancipation of the soul of a people whose bodies were freed by a great war.

"It is becoming more evident every day that this second and greater emancipation must be the result of our own effort.

"As Condorcet says, under the freest constitution ignorant people are still slaves. Our experience has taught us the profound truth of those words. But education is spreading, enlightenment is advancing. Yet when the blight of ignorance is lifted there may still remain a greater blight; we shall have gained but little if our souls remain in bondage to the idea of our own inferiority. That, ladies and gentlemen, is the great wrong which the White South by its Jim Crow legislation and its cult of negro inferiority and negro brutishness would put upon the Black South.

"I know of no greater wrong which one race of men could inflict upon another. Such an iniquity, could it be accomplished, would cry to heaven. But it has not been accomplished, nor can it ever be accomplished. That sin, in its fullness, will never stand charged against the activity of the

white men of the South, against the passivity of the white men of the North. The negro will save them from their sin. The wrong they seek to do shall not be done.

"Between the government which does evil and the people who accept it there is a certain shameful solidarity, says Victor Hugo. For many years our government permitted slavery, and the statute books were swollen and sodden with laws adding fresh fetters to the slave. And then the great war swept both shackles and slave code out of existence. But prejudice remained, and again by slow degrees this shameful solidarity finds its expression in what I have just called the Jim Crow laws of the southern states, and in all that class of legislation which aims directly and indirectly to perpetuate the mental slavery of the negro, while at the same time denying him political, social and economic equality.

"'You may succeed, but not if I can help it,' says the white man of the South to his black brother. 'You may succeed, but with this handicap,' say the constitutions of the southern states to the ambitious negro.

"And so prejudice and government are again collaborating to hold back and to restrict the negro on all sides. This, ladies and gentlemen, is the fixed policy of the entire South, and this policy is passively connived at by the North. Thus the spirit of the nation has silently arrayed itself against all that is vital in the spiritual, the moral, the intellectual and the material progress of the negro.

"What are these laws? To some of you from northern or far western states they may mean little. But to the millions of us who live south they are well known indeed. Race separation is their acknowledged aim; the humiliation and degradation of the negro their true purpose thinly veiled.

"This separation begins in childhood, in the schools of the entire South the negro child is separated from the white child. The little negro child is not good enough to open the book of knowledge seated beside a white child. They may not even enter God's House if white folks worship there. The white men and women of the South are southerners first, Chris-

tians afterward. We must ride in separate coaches, or in seats set apart for us, as though we bore the plague about in our garments.

"Not since the times of old when lepers were forbidden to mingle with the populace have laws been enacted so scornfully, so cruelly, to cut off a race of human beings from all intercourse with their fellows, if we except, perhaps, some of the laws enacted against the Jewish race. If our white fellow citizens could do so they would place the old cry of the leper upon the lips of the negro to-day, bidding him cry 'Unclean! Unclean!' as he passes along the streets or follows the windings of the country roads.

"For the rest: we must eat at separate tables, drink at separate bars, we may not enter certain parks, we may not ride in sleeping cars, however old or weary we may be. On every hand the negro meets the word 'Prohibited.'

"If he disregard the warning, arrest follows, and after arrest come fines and imprisonment, and soon the black man is a felon or a fugitive.

"And the sole basis for all this, our sole fault, is that God has given us dark skins, and that there was a time when it was profitable to import us and exploit us on the plantations of the South.

"The voting laws, and the new constitutions of many of the southern states, with their tests and their 'grandfather clauses,' have practically disfranchised the negro. They were written solely for that purpose. They are enforced to have that effect. Here again history is repeating itself. We are refused the ballot but we are still taxed to support the state. Taxation without representation is as indefensible to-day as it was a hundred years ago.

"We niggers, ladies and gentlemen, are usually a good part white. There are a great many of us who have been disfranchised by the Jim Crow laws who ought, by rights, to be voting under the Granddaddy Clause.

"And here let me pause a moment to say that no white man can justly blame any negro for his presence on this continent.

That responsibility rests wholly with the white men who brought us here. That we have increased so rapidly in numbers, another grievous fault often urged against us, is due in no small measure also to the white man, as our blood so amply testifies.

"I tell you, ladies and gentlemen, it's too late to talk the nonsense we sometimes hear about sending the negro back to Africa. All the ships in the world couldn't carry our people. And how much white blood would they send with us in such an exodus back to the jungle.

"It is a problem, this race question. There's no doubt of that: But I would say to the white man that it is a problem of his own making. I would ask him in his anger and impatience not to forget that fact. The more serious the problem is, the more serious it becomes, and it is becoming more serious every day, the more serious is his responsibility. The white man can not repudiate the negro now.

"But I digress. To revert to the Jim Crow laws and their value to the negro. This value which I see in them may not be at once apparent to us all; indeed it is the aspect least likely to attract our notice, but it exists, if rightly understood, as an immense, as an incalculable force, for our further advancement.

"These laws, which add gross present insult to the injury of the past, beget resistance. They are the stimulant, the spur, of our awakening sense of nationality. They make for consolidation, for community of interest, for unanimity of purpose.

"What was slavery in God's great purpose but an industrial education to fit us for the freedom which was bound to come? Our white masters taught us to till the land which one day we should possess, and by these very Jim Crow laws, conceived in hate, and born in fear and malice, the white man is at this moment making a nation of the negro.

"This legislation, in its inception, in its enactment, in its enforcement, is absolutely theirs. The white man alone is responsible for it, and he alone must be held accountable

for its consequences. The white man will have only himself to blame when he awakens to the fact that the nation which he has created within this nation is a hostile nation!

"History teaches us that no nation can be born within a nation without revolution; evolution if peaceful, or revolution, in plain words the old horror which we call war, if violent.

"The white man's purpose was, and is, to make us a race of serfs. The result of his efforts, ladies and gentlemen, will be a nation of free men. The white man can no more escape the laws of cause and effect than can the black man. In his blindness he has made himself the instrument of our development."

He spoke with the authority of the thousands before him whose thoughts and hopes he voiced. The natural eloquence of his race, the depth of his pent-up feeling, the immense emotionality of the man, charged his simplest utterances with meaning and significance.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he continued, "the circumstances of my life have been such that for many years I lived remote from these questions. For that very reason, perhaps, I may venture to say I believe I view certain things more clearly than those whose eyes have been obscured by the smoke of the battle.

"I see that these Jim Crow laws, detestable as they are in themselves, are rousing us to a sense of rights withheld, that they are uniting a scattered people and giving them a common cause, I see that they remind us of the need of organization, of the necessity of leadership. We have begun to appraise our forces, to estimate our strength, to wax impatient for the day to come when these wrongs shall be righted, not as a matter of charity to the weak, but of justice to the strong. These laws, which were enacted to perpetuate our serfdom, have in reality roused us to a realization of our nationality. And it is a giant which is awakening.

"We are growing impatient of sloths and idlers among us, we are a working people, therefore a forceful people, for our

work is voluntary. We must become a thinking people, a people of directed action, then we shall be an invincible people.

"Yes, my brothers, drilled and disciplined you will yet be invincible, and I warn the white man, who fears the day of our awakening as he fears no other day in all the calendar of things which are to be, I warn him that it is he himself who is hastening that day, that his hated Jim Crow laws are daily drilling you, daily instilling in your hearts the wish and the will for better things. They are teaching you firmness of purpose, determination, intention and desire. We are no longer an aimless people lounging in the sun; the white man's persecution has set us apart and has given us a cause. We value the ballot now that it is lost to us, we shall win it again, and use it to better purpose than we used it in the past. We have learned our lesson. We will not repeat our mistakes.

"A just cause stimulates patriotism. If the white man by his unjust laws will not permit us to love our native land, he can not at least forbid us to love our race. Love of race, if love of country is denied us, becomes our patriotism. The love of the negro for his own people, his devotion to their advancement, these things become his paramount duties in the face of the white man's Jim Crow laws.

"The lynch laws of the mob are but the mad echoes of these same Jim Crow laws of the iniquitous statute books. In them we see how quickly prejudice translates itself into hate, and hate into cruelty, and cruelty into a saturnalia of hideous crime.

"How long will outrage and injustice be permitted to endure? When shall we emerge from the shadow of this wrong which the dark ages of our past still cast upon us? When shall we break through these prejudices which wrap this land like a shroud?

"How can the white man be so blind that he does not see the peril he is bringing on his country? I warn him that it is not safe to repress our ambitions. I warn him that we are aware that we have the same right to be ambitious that he

has. I tell him that his policy of denying us all incentive to advance and then cursing us for our idleness and sloth is an obsolete policy. They have tried to close the door of progress in our faces and then blame us because we turned backward. But we have not turned backward, and we have not ceased to knock at the door which they have closed. We will have patience yet a little while, we will knock again and yet again, but if we are not heard the day will come when we will storm that door. You can not politically smother ten millions of people. They will struggle for breath. They will break through! As we are breaking through! Prejudice has too long sought to bar the gates of opportunity. It must be thrust aside and trampled under foot!

"Standing among you as I do to-night I might well ask myself why the negro need seek social recognition from his white neighbor, when he can find among his own people such a world of generous emotion, when he can enjoy such friendships, such companionships, share such vital common interests, be a part of such a true and inspiring brotherhood, and never go beyond the limits of his race.

"It is not, ladies and gentlemen," he bowed in courtly fashion as he spoke the words with great respect, "it is not, ladies and gentlemen, because we are not as a race sufficient unto ourselves that we seek recognition from, and equality with, the white race.

"Fondly attached as we may be by ties of blood, and by ties of affection, even by the closest tie which can exist between two human beings, the sacred tie of marriage,"

He turned to his wife as he spoke, and as he did so a torrent of applause and cheers came in response.

"It is not because we are not sufficient unto ourselves as a race, and desire to mingle with the white men for the benefit and advantage to be derived from their example, it is not for these reasons that we demand equality.

"We demand absolute and complete equality, first, because we are like our white neighbors, a race of free and independent men and women to whom it is intolerable and degrading

to admit the existence of any sort or kind of inferiority, to whom the idea of a man merely because he is white being the superior of a man merely because he is black is insulting and humiliating; an idea which if once even tacitly admitted would place a stigma, hopeless and irremediable, upon our foreheads and upon the foreheads of our children.

"Were I, as I have said, to admit that any taint does rest upon our race for what it has endured and suffered while it wore the chains of slavery, I would not lay the charge of it against my people. No. No. I would lay that sin at the doors of those who perpetrated an incalculable wrong against millions of human beings, of the dead, of the living, of countless millions of those yet to be born. If I admitted that I would indict my white father and my white brother with the greatest crime of all the ages. Oh, my friends, my friends, what shall be said of men who held us no better than the beasts and yet who mingled their blood with ours!

"But, my friends, though I can not say that the white man seeks now, or ever has sought, to prevent this awful crime, this permanent degradation of a race, and though I believe he often thinks, and sometimes even boasts, that the part he played in our captivity has forever set the seal of degradation and servility upon us, yet I can not allow him to charge himself with so great a crime. He is not guilty of this monstrous iniquity.

"No. We must acquit him. The crime with which he would charge himself has never been committed. Let him thank God for that! The negro is not and never was a servile race. That our condition in this land was so long servile arose through no fault of our own. We were literally prisoners of war, at the absolute mercy of our captors; and they had no mercy. Moreover these prisoners of war were not all men. Many of these prisoners of war were women. Of their children, born in captivity, many, if not most, had white blood in their veins. It is a poor thing to call these captives servile because, far from the continent which gave them birth, enmeshed by ties of blood, secret and unacknowledged though

they may have been, they did not wage a fiercer strife for freedom.

"I say the negro race to-day triumphantly refutes by its amazing advancement the charge of permanent degradation and permanent servility.

"Ladies and gentlemen, there is a great deal in the point of view. We shall never be seen as we really are until the hostile glance shall be corrected by the friendly eye. It is easy to abuse us, to denounce us, but the man who denounces us will never understand us.

"I seek a closer acquaintance with my white neighbors as a better basis for mutual understanding. I advocate equality between the races as the surest foundation for justice, as the only foundation for peace.

"Friendship is better than enmity, love is better than hate. I advocate a closer relation of the races as the only possible antidote to the great race problem which all men dread. If we are not friends we shall be enemies. If we do not love each other we shall hate. We do hate, my brothers, we hate with a terrible and righteous hatred the crimes which have been enacted against our people. Woe to that day when our specific hatreds fuse into one blind general hatred of the race to which we trace our wrongs.

"Our road leads onward and upward, our destiny will be fulfilled. Our advance can no more be retarded than the tides of the ocean can be held back.

"The wise man does not attempt to thwart the inevitable, although the foolish man may do so to his cost. The tide of our race is rising and it seeks the broad sea of opportunity. No man can stay it. No man can keep us from our own. I am an advocate of peace and good will. But I say to you, let the peace be honorable or it will not be lasting. When God cries forward to a people no group of men at Richmond, at Atlanta, at Memphis, nor at Montgomery can cry halt. When God's handwriting is visible upon the wall the words men write upon the statute books are vain."

He paused. A great roar rose to him from the assembled

multitude. He raised his right hand high and trumpeted above the tumult.

"And now, here and to-night I wish to preach a new crusade, a crusade for the repeal of all unjust race legislation; and it is all unjust; for the repeal of every Jim Crow law which is sowing dissension between the black man and the white; a crusade for absolute social equality, for absolute political equality, for absolute educational equality, for absolute religious equality; a great black crusade against lynching and lynch laws in all their hideous forms; lynch law, my brothers, that first of the Jim Crow laws which the common consent of the South has legalized.

"A great black crusade under the Cross of Christ for that brotherhood of man which alone can save these two vast armies now marshaling in the land, one white, one black, from meeting in the shock of war, and can unite them as true allies marching together to the great goal of actual freedom—of freedom realized. Oh, my brothers, shall we face each other, the white man, and the black, in deadly hate, or shall we march on side by side, allies in the battle of human progress? There must be this alliance or there must be war.

"Will you join this Black Crusade and save your country from this peril, which all men see though most men still deny? Will you join this great black crusade against ignorance, injustice, prejudice and oppression; a crusade for liberty, equality, fraternity, for manhood.

"The lash has fallen from the master's hand, the shackles from the slave, let white and black march on together under the great banner of equality.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for the indulgence with which you have heard me."

He bowed and turned to resume his seat, but the chief personages on the platform had risen and were crowding about him, shaking his hands, congratulating him, and hailing him as the new leader of his people, and his Black Crusade as a watchword for the forward movement of the negro.

When the tumult of applause was stilled Bishop Comfort

said to the people that Doctor Brent had unfurled a great banner over them, a banner under which they could march forward to the Promised Land where their dreams and their ideals should all be realized.

The choirs were still singing as a great throng escorted Brent from the hall. The horses were taken from his carriage, and he was drawn in triumph through the streets to the door of the bishop's house. Brent believed in the crusade which he had preached and his hearers believed in him.

As he ascended the steps, followed by Mrs. Brent, he paused to turn and thank his new friends for their demonstration of approval.

"Don't forget our crusade," he said, "our black crusade. Good night, brothers."

As he spoke a strong voice at the edge of the crowd began to sing "God be with you till we meet again."

The refrain was taken up and the song was sung through before the throng of negroes dispersed to their homes.

CHAPTER XXXII

BAMFORD SUBMITS AN OFFER

All the publicity which Brent had previously received was as nothing to that which followed his "Black Crusade" speech, as it came to be known. It created controversy. In it the North read only a fearless demand for fair play, a just claim boldly put, but the South read in it a challenge.

The reception of the speech by the audience and by the press established Brent's confidence in himself. Out of it came to him a new feeling of sincere belief in the destiny of his race which gave him a moral courage he had lacked before.

In Mrs. Brent's eyes her husband had regained not a little of the ground which he had lost at Comorn. She began to appreciate his celebrity. It justified her choice of him. Moreover she had come to apprehend some of the enormous issues involved in the mere numerical increase of the negro race. The thousands of dark faces she had seen turned toward her husband in Convention Hall convinced her there was a problem, even if there was not a cause.

One serious obstacle alone remained to disturb the better understanding, so comforting to both, which was now growing up between them: Eugene's presence in Northmoreland County. To this Mrs. Brent's mind constantly reverted. Terrible possibilities kept recurring to her as though the events she dreaded had already taken place and she repeatedly urged her husband to cut short his stay in Washington and return to Comorn to dissuade his son from the pursuit of Polly Beckford.

But Brent was not disposed to leave the warm atmosphere of his success. He had begun to feel his celebrity as an agreeable influence in his daily life; it padded his world

like scented cotton, and he sank into its embrace with all the willingness of those who achieve fame by easy methods. Dignity and power were to be his attendants henceforth, and to his vision, the years in their amplitude stretched before him promising increase of all he coveted. If, in his estimate of himself, Brent somewhat anticipated his fame it was not remarkable. Had he not done so he would have been unique among the great.

One morning, a few days after his speech, as he was busily searching the out-of-town papers for comments, Mrs. Brent entered the study where he sat alone.

"Here is a letter from Hortense," she said as she closed the door carefully behind her. "I wish you would open it at once."

"Perhaps I'd better read it aloud, Molly," Brent answered as he laid aside his papers. "Then you will know how little cause there is for your anxiety." Opening and unfolding the letter carefully he read:

"Dear Papa. The news from Washington is all very thrilling and Celia and I are immensely proud of our wonderful father. You, and your speech, I hear from Joe Macie, are the only topics discussed at the wharf, at Mr. Hesketh's store, or wherever two or three are gathered together in Northmoreland County. No, I am wrong; there is one other topic of conversation. Mr. Eugene Raymond, of whom, of course, you remember hearing so much before you left home, has become engaged to Polly Beckford."

"Then it's just as I feared!" cried Mrs. Brent.

Her husband made no answer but read on.

"I hear from Joe, who is our general intelligencer, that the wedding is not to take place until late in the winter. It is reported that Mr. Raymond has given Polly Beckford a wonderful old rose diamond ring, quite like the one mama used to wear and which was left to my brother when she died."

"Eugene has given her his mother's ring."

"That's what Hortense writes," Brent answered stolidly. "Of course she has to be very careful what she puts in her letters. But there's no doubt she's seen her brother. He must have told her about the ring himself."

He paused and a new light filled his eyes, a light of triumph.

"Well," he said at last, "he's my son, and he's engaged to be married to Judge Beckford's daughter. I knew all along he could win his way anywhere, if he wasn't tagged as a 'nigger.' I don't say I'm exactly glad of it, Molly," he added as he saw the look of agitation deepening on his wife's face. "No, I don't say that. But I do say this goes a long way to square my account with Mason Beckford. I wonder how he'd regard his daughter's engagement if he really knew the facts."

"Julius, you are forgetting about the girl." Mrs. Brent lowered her voice almost to a whisper as she approached her husband. "You must remember her. No matter what you do, no matter what height you reach, such a deception would bring everything crashing in ruin about your head. Mark my words, Julius, nothing can ever make it right. No. No. Don't try to put me off. You must stop to consider. You must decide before it is too late. So far as this affair of Eugene's is concerned it isn't safe to let it drift a day longer."

Brent frowned impatiently. But Mrs. Brent persisted.

"I must speak, Julius. It is for Eugene's good as well as yours and hers. I want your promise that this engagement shall be broken off at once, and that Eugene shall leave Virginia. Julius, I want your promise now."

Brent's annoyance gave way before his wife's earnestness.

"Maybe you're right, Molly," he said at last. "Though I can't say I see things exactly as you do. Perhaps it's all gone far enough. I've made my point. There never can be any question about that. When we go back to Comorn I'll see Eugene and get him to break off the engagement, and there'll be no harm done."

"I'm thankful to hear you say that, Julius." She paused

and then asked anxiously: "But suppose he really loves this girl and is unwilling to give her up? What could you do then?"

"Gene won't refuse," he answered shortly.

"But if he should? I tell you, Julius, you must come to some decision now, or, between them, Hortense and Eugene will have their way."

"Gene won't refuse," Brent repeated stubbornly. "And if he does I can always stop things quickly enough by threatening to go to Judge Beckford with the whole story."

He paused. The idea, put forward merely to quiet his wife's fears, appealed to him, and he sat musing for a moment. He could see himself being driven to the door of Avalon, he could see the look of amazement on the haughty, parchment colored face of the old aristocrat, as he told him of his experiment, and in a few simple and well chosen words, broke off the engagement. Then, his errand done, he would drive back to Comorn leaving the man who had once humiliated him humbled and broken. If it all got into the papers it would be certain to occasion comment.

Mrs. Brent's voice roused him from his agreeable reverie.

"No, Julius, you can never go to Judge Beckford with this story. You would not even be safe at Comorn if he learned of it. Eugene must leave the neighborhood. You can never tell Judge Beckford that he is your son."

"Why not?" Brent asked. "What purpose will be served by keeping it a secret? It's too big a thing to throw away. They can't complain so long as I break it off, if it is only an hour before the wedding. My hands would still be clean."

"No, Julius. I tell you it will never be safe for Judge Beckford to learn the truth about this matter."

"Not safe?" he demanded arrogantly, his anger rising. "Not safe? Why not, I'd like to know?"

"The man would be relentless. You could never explain to him. He would not hear you out. You would not be safe in his sight for an instant if he ever learned the truth."

"Nonsense," he answered roughly. "Nonsense. A man of

my position can't be shot down like a common nigger, if that's what you mean. If I went to Avalon Judge Beckford would hear me, and he'd think twice, I reckon, before he tried violence with me."

"You must never run that risk, Julius. Your fame, your success, your ability, nothing, makes the slightest difference to such a man as that."

"Yes, that's true enough," he cried. "You've hit the nail on the head this time." He rose and paced the room. "That's what makes me furious. If I were worth ten millions, if I were president, I'd still be nothing to them but a common nigger. The damned aristocrats! Do you know what would happen if I went to Avalon, and Judge Beckford saw me coming?" he demanded, raising his voice as he approached her, his face livid with sudden rage. "You don't know, but I'll tell you! I'll tell you what he'd do. He'd have the servant send me to the kitchen door, by God, he would!"

He paced the room in fury, storming on.

"I ought to let Gene marry the girl, then let them learn whose son he is. Think of the insults they've put upon me. Think of the day I landed. Think of that vestry meeting. Think of Celia and the school. Think of Miss Constance's funeral. They haven't spared me anything."

But even as he spoke his passion ebbed before his wife's stern disapproval.

"Oh, well," he said. "Oh, well. I'll go back to Comorn with you. I'll see Eugene. I'll stop it. But they make me furious sometimes when I remember all I've suffered at their hands."

As he spoke his sullen mood returned.

"Oh, Julius, Julius, if you had only listened to me in the first place," his wife said brokenly. "If it has been hard for you what do you think it must have been for me?"

As she spoke she lifted the heavy locks from her forehead and pushed them back.

"Look," she cried. "Do you see the gray about my temples? I hadn't a white hair before I went to Comorn Hall."

"Poor Molly," Brent said, his quick emotion touched. "Poor Molly. You've had the worst of it after all. I didn't stop to think how hard this bore on you. I reckon it's easier to do the fighting than just to sit at home and wait. I'll do what you want. I'll see Eugene and stop the marriage. I reckon more harm than good would come of it in the end."

As he spoke there came a knock upon the door and the servant entered with a card.

"It's Bamford," Brent said, his troubled look giving place to a smile. "I won't be half sorry to see him. I've been wondering why he didn't turn up in Washington. He is after some articles I suppose."

An hour later Mrs. Brent heard the door close as her husband's visitor left the house. When Brent entered the room she saw at once that something of importance had occurred.

"Did Mr. Bamford come to see you about anything for the New York papers?" she asked.

"No, Molly," he answered as he drew a chair near hers. "It seems he has been sent on here by the best known lecture bureau in New York to have a talk with me and learn just what my terms are to deliver a series of lectures through the northern and western cities this autumn and winter. They offer me a big guarantee, and my expenses, railroads and hotels, and fifty per cent. of the net profits. You remember I told you Bamford spoke of something of that sort at Comorn. But it's the speech I made the other night that's brought this offer."

Mrs. Brent was visibly impressed.

"Will you accept their offer, Julius?" she asked.

"It looks to me like it was providential," he replied, lapsing for a moment into the vernacular. "I haven't told you, Molly, but I've been a good deal worried about money matters lately. This proposition of Bamford's will just about tide me over and give me the ready money I need. And it may stand me in good stead in the future, too. Bamford says once I make a start, make the field mine, I can go on lecturing forever. He says I ought to strike while the iron is hot, while the

papers are full of what I've been doing. He's got some splendid ideas about my lithographs. He wants one showing me standing before Comorn Hall with you at my side. And he has other good ideas. He wants me to take for my subject the present condition and the future of the negro in America. Thinks I should call the lecture *Why I Demand Equality*. It's the equality idea that they can't stand hearing about down South. And the more the southern papers object the better, for the northern papers will keep the talk going as long as they do. He says it's a sin and a shame to waste all the advertising I'm getting." He laughed. "Bamford says I ought to cash it in and bank the proceeds. And I think I'd better do it."

"When would you begin, if you decide to accept this offer?" Mrs. Brent asked. An idea had presented itself to her mind.

"In a week or so. At least that's what they want."

"But you would still have time to go back to Comorn with me and see Eugene?"

Brent frowned impatiently at the recurrence of the hateful topic.

"I ought to go," he admitted. "Yes, I'll go. I'll see Bamford again this afternoon and settle about the day I'm to run over to New York to sign the contracts, and then you and I can take the boat to-morrow."

"If you will do that, Julius," his wife said, greatly relieved, "then I shall be content."

But it was not to be. In the afternoon, before Brent held his second interview with Bamford, he was notified by telegram that he had been nominated for president of the United States by a convention of colored delegates in Atlanta.

"What do you think of that?" he asked as he tossed the telegram across the table to Bamford half an hour later.

"Say, Judge, but that's great," Bamford said as he finished reading the telegram. "Say, I'd like to see you in the White House. I suppose when you get there you'll have a job for me?"

"You can pick your own job when I'm president," the great

man answered with a genial laugh. "But that's nonsense," he added soberly. "No colored man will ever be elected to the presidency in my time. But it may happen in the next generation. It's bound to happen sooner or later."

He rose from his seat to pace the room for a moment and then came back to the table and took up the telegram.

"They'll take this nomination a joke, I reckon, and there'll be a great laugh about it in all the papers of the South. Even the northern papers won't take it seriously."

"No, I suppose not," Bamford agreed. "But it's good advertising just the same."

"It's more than that," Brent answered. "Much more than that."

"What do you mean, Judge?" Bamford questioned, impressed by the tone which Brent had taken.

"It's politics." And Brent frowned down upon the younger man, his brow furrowed, and his eyes intent. "Suppose that by accepting this nomination, as I shall, and meeting this situation seriously while others laugh, I get the negro vote of the nation back of me? Who'll laugh then? Suppose there's a close election. Not this year, not next year, but ten years hence, when I've got things organized and in my hands. Well, maybe if I'm not good enough to eat at the White House, as some folks seem to think, the day may come when I can dictate to the country the man who shall go there as president."

"By George," Bamford exclaimed. "I wonder if any one in the administration sees far enough ahead to think of that?"

Next day the morning papers made a feature of Brent's nomination. The evening papers printed a dignified interview in which Doctor Brent signified to the country at large that he had telegraphed his acceptance of the nomination. It was his purpose, he said, to unite the scattered negro vote and make it the power in the land which the interests of his race demanded it should become.

That afternoon as Brent stepped from his carriage at the wharf a letter was handed to him by a messenger who had followed from Bishop Comfort's house. The letter contained

a request for an interview to consider matters of urgent importance and was signed by a well-known senator. The hour suggested for the interview was nine o'clock that evening.

Mrs. Brent made no effort to conceal her disappointment.

"You'll wait over until to-morrow, Molly?" he asked. "And then we'll go home together."

"No," she answered. "Stay if you must, but since I am at the wharf I am going back to-day. I know I can do nothing to influence Eugene, but at least I shall be less anxious there than I have been since we left home."

"I'll follow to-morrow without fail, Molly," Brent assured her as he turned to recross the gangplank. "You have the horses sent to the landing for me. And don't worry. I'll put matters right. I'm beginning to see things as you do and I shan't be sorry when Eugene is safe out of this scrape."

That evening, behind closed doors, several gentlemen, high in the councils of the state, after complimenting Brent on his eloquence and expressing the confidence which they felt in his ability, intimated that if he would take the stump for the party in power at the approaching election he might, if he desired, be appointed recorder of the treasury, or minister to Haiti, if the verdict of the polls was favorable.

As he listened Brent realized that while certain editors might make merry over his nomination there were those in power who wished to align him on their side or to remove him to a safe distance from the country.

Brent thanked the gentlemen for the distinguished consideration shown him, but explained that his engagements would prevent him from filling the rôle they suggested. He promised, however, to use any slight influence he might possess for the return of his friends, as he termed them, to office.

"I'm not going to let them harness me up to their band wagon," he told Bamford late that night in the bishop's study. "No, sir, when I take the stump I'll take it for myself, or for some issue vital to my people. Only big men, and independent men, get big rewards. Haiti!" and he snapped his fingers.

"They can't buy me with Haiti," he told his friend the

bishop after Bamford had gone. "The time is coming when no party can buy the negro vote with a few second-rate appointments. We've sold out too cheaply in the past, that's been our trouble. The day is coming when our votes will hold the balance of power. Likely that day will come in your time and mine. If it does they'll be offering me a cabinet position, or a first-class embassy. Haiti." He laughed. "That was good enough for Fred Douglass, maybe, but it isn't good enough for J. C. Brent. I reckon all this will seem like a dream when I get back to Comorn," he added with a sigh.

Brent believed, when he went to sleep that night, that he was sincere in his intention of returning to Comorn the next day. He felt it would be a relief to have Eugene safe out of Virginia. Yes, he would be glad to see Comorn again. Its history was not, after all, entirely in the past. It looked to him as though there was a chapter to be written yet. He would be very quiet during the few days he remained at the Hall. Idle curiosity should not be satisfied. If he remained over Sunday he might, as a matter of principle merely, attend service at Weyanoke Church.

He would visit his mother and his half-brother, Hamp, openly, that no one should say he shunned his own people, however backward they might be. In the evening he would drop in at the colored church, and address a few words of brotherly encouragement and good will to the congregation. He was a public man now, and he meant that all his acts should be such that the public might scrutinize them without shame to him. After all a few days at Comorn would have their compensations. And so the great man dozed and slept.

CHAPTER XXXIII

MRS. DELAFIELD

With the morning came a note from Mrs. Delafield asking Brent to call in the afternoon. The *Powhatan* sailed at four. If he saw Mrs. Delafield he would be unable to return to Comorn before the day set for his meeting with the managers of the lecture bureau in New York.

The temptation, however, was too strong to be resisted. He wrote a hurried letter to his wife telling her that business connected with his approaching tour made it impossible for him to "run home" until after his talk with his agents in New York. This letter he sent by special messenger to the boat with the request that it be delivered to his coachman at Weyanoke Landing.

His mind at ease his thoughts once more reverted to Mrs. Delafield. Through her he approached the great white world where wealth and fashion and power moved forever in the sunlight of perpetual publicity. It was much to have a hand stretched out to him from this mysterious world; when it beckoned its summons could not go unheeded.

Mrs. Delafield was a disappointed woman. She was rich beyond all her needs. Her position as a leader of society was unassailable. Yet Mrs. Delafield was dissatisfied. Her ambitions and her capacities, as she conceived them, were for larger and nobler issues than those with which her luxurious and successful life had brought her into contact.

After having spent many years abroad she determined that Europe had no career to offer her. She returned to America and, abjuring New York, took a splendid house in Washington, hoping to gather about her a group of men whom she

might influence and inspire. At the worst she felt that she could still breathe in the diplomatic circle; and the White House was, at last, occupied by people one could really know.

But from the first her experiment was a failure. She was sought, of course, and her rare and exclusive entertainments, at which, as her detractors said, she put fashionable Washington on ice, became the last word in elegance.

She saw that she could become the arbiter of the social life of the capital as she had been of New York a decade before, but she found not one statesman whom she could guide or inspire. They impressed her as an inexpressibly sordid and greedy group of ill-bred men bent only upon securing for themselves and their middle-class families the rudimentary elements of wealth and social position, the mere a, b, c of life; things which she had long regarded as too obvious to be valued and which she would gladly have flung to the four winds for some great cause.

If Mrs. Delafield spoke of vital issues, of principles, she found her hearers timid and conventional. One or two members of the Senate impressed her more favorably. But these exceptional men seemed to be in no need of the inspiration she had crossed the sea to bring them. And she soon dubbed them all a dreary conglomeration of small lawyers and financial agents and gave them up in a body.

A glance was cast at the Supreme Bench, but, important as might be the labors and achievements of the learned judges, nothing was to be discerned through her lorgnette which in the least captivated her romantic nature.

The wives of the members of Congress, when she met them, for unavoidable situations arose sometimes even in the life of Mrs. Delafield, were for the most part best described by her as "worthy women, chiefly from the Middle West, who were still buying small diamonds set in a great deal of vulgar looking gold." She did not respect them for their desire to appear like one another. She admired the pattern so little that to her there was no virtue in its endless duplication.

Mrs. Delafield had no confidant save her journal. She had

kept it faithfully for many years because she found it a safe vent for her feelings, and because she was haunted by the hope that she might yet play a part so important in the world that future generations would be interested in all the secret processes of her mind and heart. In her journal she was on parade quite as much as in her daily life. Only the part she played was for the eye of the historian, the eye of posterity.

Here and there she gracefully admitted a fault, if it were picturesque, here and there she suggested a romance; she mentioned the king's attentions; there was a veiled allusion to the crown prince who had wished to elope with her, she spoke of having put the empress at her ease; but for the most part the narration was faithful enough.

In the hidden depths of her soul the great Mrs. Delafield concealed a skeleton; it was a love of the melodramatic. Her good taste had it under lock and key, but occasionally she gave it an airing in the pages of her journal.

"Posterity is entitled to know me as I really am," she wrote. "The secrets of my soul do not belong to my own time, but to the future. These pages will be read when no heart can be pained by their perusal."

Interest after interest occupied her, only to be abandoned when she had devoured the little kernel of novelty each held. She had given up all idea of a salon in Washington. As she said, it was a saloon which the average politician sought as a place of resort, and she was too old to turn barmaid.

Mrs. Delafield was really waiting with some impatience for an opportune moment to retire to Europe when her attention was attracted by the accounts of Doctor Brent of Comorn Hall which appeared in connection with his suit against the vestry of Weyanoke Church. She had at one time made a specialty of the race question, advocating the cause of the negro rather because she found it a daring thing to do than from any real convictions of her own.

But the topic soon lost all savor for her and she had quite forgotten to champion the oppressed Ethiopian at the dinner tables of southern hostesses when the dramatic story of

Brent's return to the scene of his youth reawakened her interest.

She read everything she could find in the papers regarding this "remarkable man" as she called him. She even made a note or two respecting him in her journal. The story of his white wife further fixed her attention. She found herself wondering if Mrs. Brent ever had any regrets; if the strange relationship did not at times become repulsive to her. The thing was bizarre, and more and more her imagination employed itself with its consideration.

The arrival of Doctor Brent and his wife in Washington was so fully chronicled that she felt she had seen the strong, handsome, energetic figure, the swarthy face, the loose masses of wavy black hair brushed away from the temples, and the calm, handsome, richly-dressed woman with the blue eyes and deliberate speech, who accompanied him, and when she read in the morning paper that her hero had been subjected to insult on the electric train, she obeyed an impulse and ordered her carriage sent at once to Alexandria.

To Mrs. Delafield's friends her act seemed only consistent with her previous professions. To Mrs. Delafield herself, however, it was a more serious matter. She knew she had permitted her skeleton to escape and that it had dictated her action. She was divided between secret alarm and delight at her own temerity.

But after her first meeting with Brent she acknowledged to herself that she had at last touched a vital issue, that in him she had found her leader of men. Mrs. Delafield was by every instinct of her nature exclusive and patrician, yet Brent did not offend her. All that was of the negro in him she appraised and valued, all that was attributable to the white blood in his veins she noted, but most she set herself to understand those blended qualities which resulted from the union of the white and black blood and which refused to be assigned to either independent of the other. Here were primitive forces and emotions translated, modified, into terms she might understand.

"She realized in him," she confided to her journal, "a composite of the southern aristocrat and the Congo king. It is given to few to encounter such a person."

While Brent's speech had thrilled her, the vast audience was scarcely less interesting than the man who addressed it with such understanding and success. In it, to her surprise, she saw every type of the white race with its alloy of African blood, and it occurred to her that it was high time the white man's blood in the veins of the negro should be studied as well as the negro blood. She felt vaguely that the element of the white race mixed with the black race was yet to become one of the most vital factors of the great problem.

And here had arisen a man strong enough, resolute enough, cautious enough, to weld these people together under his leadership. What a power! A tenth of the entire population of the greatest nation in the world under the control of one man. What an avalanche might be launched by the single will of the leader of such a host. The man and his enormous possibilities dazzled her. If he could solve the race problem he would be the greatest man of his time.

Saner thoughts came when her excitement had been subdued by the passing of the night. Perhaps Brent was not, single-handed, to accomplish the uplifting of his race. Perhaps time alone, and many generations could effect their full development. Evolution was a slow process. Yet these doubts did not lessen her admiration for the man, nor diminish her sense of the greatness of his work.

Mrs. Delafield felt that while she could not commit herself wholly to the cause, she could with safety encourage Brent's heroic efforts, and so in a few graceful lines she had opened the way for him to come to her again.

"I was enchanted," she wrote, "by all the romantic and masterful thoughts you expressed so admirably and so eloquently. Do come to me on Thursday afternoon and tell me of your plans for the advancement of your race, and the settlement of all these perplexing questions which vex us so."

"Tell me," she said to Brent after they had spoken of his

address and he had told her of his invitation to enter politics, of the Haitian appointment which he had declined, and of his approaching lecture tour; "tell me, is there an element of truth in this talk which I have heard of a deep-seated antagonism of the men of your race to the men of mine? Is there a real and growing hostility on the part of the negro toward the white man?"

"Before I went back to Comorn Hall," Brent answered slowly, "I should have said that no such general feeling of hostility existed, and that it could not exist where there was no special provocation on the part of the white man."

He paused, but his silence invited her question.

"But you'd not say it now that you've returned to Virginia?"

"No, I wouldn't. I will tell you what I would not tell many white people."

"You will confide in me," murmured Mrs. Delafield.

"Yes," said Brent deliberately, "I will. I'll tell you the truth. I believe there does exist in the mind of practically every negro a deep-rooted prejudice against all the white race; a bitter prejudice in many cases; a fierce, smoldering race hatred in others. I have heard of it from every one. I have learned to know what it is myself."

"You deplore it?"

"No," he answered boldly. "I'm glad of it. It's a good sign. It sets us apart from the brute beasts with which so many of the white race wish to class us. We do not lick the hand that strikes us. We have the white man's own strong instinct to strike back. And beyond that it is the most potent factor in welding my people together. It is really the foundation upon which we've got to build."

"Yes, you will band together to resist your oppressors. You will organize for the protection of your rights."

"To protect them," he answered, "to secure them, to enforce them."

"Tell me, Doctor Brent, to what do you attribute this antagonism? It did not exist in the time of slavery as it does to-day?"

"I don't think it existed then at all," he replied. "If it did I don't remember it. I didn't feel it then. It has come with our responsibilities. It has come with the generation born since Lincoln freed the slaves. The old slaves were glad enough to be free, but very few of them cared for equality. I don't believe any of them really thought themselves the equals of their white masters. But the generation born out of slavery, born to the responsibilities of free men, and not trained to regard the white man as superior, has come to hate the white man, not only as his father's oppressor, but as the one who would handicap all his efforts; yes, in plain words, to look upon him as his natural enemy. And the old people have come to see with their children's eyes. The negro is handicapped. He is an inferior. He is a nigger. Only the humblest occupations are open to him. He is one of a servile class, and the white people with whom he comes in contact never let him forget it. And in return he blames them, not only for the conditions which go to justify their belief that he is inferior, but, and more bitterly, for the belief itself. This race hatred will never abate one jot until the white man admits the negro to absolute equality, and not then until the negro is convinced by his own achievements that he is the equal of the white men. If white men want to live in peace and safety in the South they'd better help the negro to think himself as good as they are. They won't really be safe until he does. What's at the root of all these atrocious murders and brutal outrages? What can it be but brooding sullen hate? 'I'm as good as you are,' they say to themselves every time a white man calls them Sam or Jake or Bill, while they must give the Sir and Mister back to him. 'I'll show you some of these days,' and they do."

"What," asked Mrs. Delafield, smiling at Brent, "what do you mean to be? An emperor, with an empire in Central America, or in the West Indies, or a great leader here in America, one who will hold ten millions of people in the hollow of his hand? Surely, with your eloquence, with your power to sway men, it is but for you to choose."

"My work, if I have any to do, is right here in America," Brent answered.

He left her presence more intoxicated than before, while she denied herself to all visitors and entered the substance of their conversation in her journal.

"He has great possibilities," she wrote. "A career of magnitude opens before him. He will be an immense success or a Titanic failure. He is in the hands of the gods."

In Northmoreland County the summer was waning. Autumn was stealing gently over the land. The rainy season had ended, and now clear day succeeded clear day and only the soft haze veiled the stretches of woodland and water from the midday blaze of the sun. Scarcely a cloud shadow crossed the forests. Along the roadsides the leaves of the gum trees were turning crimson, while the neglected fields were yellowing with the golden-rod which struggled for place with the tall ragweed everywhere. The corn stood ready to cut. Still occasional fireflies might be seen, but they flew low, and were spiritless. The whip-poor-wills still called at evening, and still the countless swallows wheeled and circled at twilight above the massive chimneys of old Comorn Hall.

It was at this time that it became known that John Brent had left the Cross Roads. Having recovered from his long illness he had gone north to remain indefinitely. It was reported that Doctor Carniel had secured a position for him in the law firm of an old friend in Philadelphia where John could continue his studies and at the same time earn his living. But John's real destination was not Philadelphia. Thankful as the Macies were to have him gone, they were still uneasy as to the motive of his going.

The announcement of Polly Beckford's engagement to Eugene Raymond had given the scattered population of the region something to discuss besides Doctor Brent's experiences in Washington, John Brent's absence, the reign of the Macies at Brentwood, and the scandal of young Macie's pursuit of Hortense Brent. For a time these interesting topics were laid

aside while the happy prospects of the judge's daughter and the handsome young stranger were upon all tongues. The wedding, Mrs. Beckford told her friends, would not take place until late in the winter.

Raymond had left the club house a few days before the announcement of his engagement to take up his quarters at Broken Banks, which was much nearer Avalon than Colonel Washington's plantation. If Watt had any regrets he took care never to express them.

It was in Mr. Hesketh's store at the Cross Roads that Judge Beckford read aloud a verbatim report of Brent's Black Crusade speech to a mixed but attentive audience.

Doctor Carniel and Mr. Braxton stool near the counter, their eyes fixed on Judge Beckford's face, while Grandpa Bird and Murphy Bird, the latter engaged in adjusting the small anatomy of the unfailing Salvadorie to the amenities of his first pair of ready-made corduroy trousers in the decent seclusion of a dark corner, were not the least attentive listeners.

"And Gus Wyatt reprinted all that nonsense in the *Oyster Shell*?" Doctor Carniel asked as the judge concluded.

"He did. Yes, sir," Judge Beckford answered as he glanced again at the head-line. "But he makes no comment that I can discover. The Baltimore and Richmond papers will be along to-morrow from Broken Banks, I suppose, if a beneficent government lets us have them at all. We'll get comment enough then."

The judicial eye rested upon Grandpa Bird in quiet contemplation for a moment. Then the judge inquired:

"What do you think of that for a speech, grandpa? You're the oldest white man present and we'd like to hear from you. I suppose you know they've nominated Murphy's former landlord for the high office of president of the United States."

"Nominated that nigger doctor for president of the United States? Who the hell done that?" demanded Grandpa Bird with spirit. "I ain't heard tell of that afore."

"He was nominated by some negro politicians who have

been holding a convention in Atlanta," Judge Beckford explained.

"Well, I do declare to goodness I wouldn't of took nobody's word for it but yours, Judge, blessed if I would. If Murphy had of told me I'd 'a' called him a liar just as quick as a wink. My, my, ain't it awful. Never," declared Grandpa Bird, nobly rising to meet the best expectations of his hearers, "never did I expect for to live for to see such doings, and such carryings on. I declare to goodness I can't get my sleep nights a-thinking an' a-figgering into my head for to see the Lord's hand into such doings. But I ain't seed no trace nor track of foreordination into hit nohow. I declare I ain't."

"Then you don't believe what our colored brother says about equality?" the judge asked.

"Me believe such rubbish? No, sir," the patriarch replied. "Equality's a thing a body'd better not meddle with if he's a nigger. Hit's into the Declaration of Independence, I reckon, an' thar the niggers had better leave it stay. My, my, ain't it awful the way that nigger doctor talks an' carries on? A body would naturally think some one would of took an' run him out of town. It certainly is scan'lous to hear a nigger man talk like that into a free country, an' no white man by to tell him to shut up sharp. It certainly is the most awfulest thing I ever heard of. Et a meal's vittles to the White House an' then took an' raised a rumpus like that. Behaved like he was crazy, an' proud of it. My goodness to gracious, what's the country a-coming to?"

And Grandpa Bird, feeling that he had acquitted himself with considerable credit, lapsed into silence.

"Well, Murphy, and how do you feel about it?" Judge Beckford asked when he was convinced that Grandpa Bird, having struck twelve, so to speak, had quite run down.

But Mr. Bird parried.

"That nigger gentleman's got the free use of his tongue, ain't he?" he asked as one who seeks for guidance rather than as one who hazards an opinion. "I never see such a power of tongue talk with so little sense into hit."

As he spoke he reappeared from the shadowy corner where he had been engaged with Salvadorie, the whip-whip of the child's new corduroy trousers reminding his parent pleasantly of his reestablished credit.

"I don't fancy the set of the seat of them pants, Mr. Hesketh," said Mr. Bird as he surveyed Salvadorie with an impartial eye. "No, sir, them pants ain't shaped like what they ought to be or Salvadorie ain't. I know he's had stomach trouble an' been afflicted, but I ain't able to account for the set of them pants noways if they is the regular size for a child of his age. If he was a-going to bulge out like that I could of picked points onto him where it'd looked a heap sight better."

"I suppose you've given the new doctor a trial, Murphy?" Judge Beckford asked with a covert wink in the direction of Doctor Carniel.

"No, sir, I ain't," Mr. Bird replied, while a pale gleam of unshakable resolution flickered in his mild blue eyes. "I don't reckon I'm a-going to take my medical trade away from Doctor Carniel, the way some I might name has been a-doing. When that female lady doctor throwed me down the way she done I said to Mrs. Bird right then an' thar that I'd took the last chanct I was a-going to take with what was left of my insides. No, sir, when I put my liver into Doctor Carniel's hands I said I was a-going to leave it stay there, and I am. When a body's got one foot into the grave, as you might say, it ain't no time for to put the other into a new shoe."

"That's a very handsome compliment, Murphy," said Doctor Carniel. "I'm obliged to you for it."

"My, there's that yellow cat of Jack Yutsy's eating grass again," cried Grandpa Bird with happy irrelevance as he looked from the window. "It's a sure sign of rain. Throw a stone at her, Salvadorie, and mebbly that'll ward off a shower."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE LECTURE TOUR BEGINS

The day following his visit to Mrs. Delafield found the great man in consultation with the head of the lecture bureau which Bamford represented. Brent spent a week in New York, and might easily have returned to Comorn to see Eugene, as his wife had urged, but he became so engrossed in the preliminaries of his tour that he let the opportunity pass unimproved.

It was with a feeling of surprise that one morning, sinking back into the comfortable seat of a parlor car, he realized his career as a lecturer was really to begin that night. Presently this feeling was succeeded by the pleasant consciousness that he had been recognized by his fellow travelers, and that his presence had created a mild sensation. Thus agreeably reminded of his own importance, he looked from the window with benign complaisance upon a world which hurried, hurried, hurried away behind him while he rushed onward to the fulfilment of his high destiny.

Brent's lecture tour opened brilliantly in Hartford. The hall in which he spoke was packed. In their city, he assured his hearers, he felt among friends, the friends of his people. He knew there must be many before him whose fathers, or husbands, or brothers had given their lives for the cause of the slave on the battle-fields of the South. To those he wished to say that the sacrifice had not been in vain. He had come north, in part, to render an accounting of the progress of the negro to all who had earned the right to ask such an accounting.

He spoke of the freedom, the space about his soul, which he felt in the North, in contrast to the narrowing influence of race prejudice which he had encountered in Virginia.

"A man must have faith in himself if he is to do a man's work in the world," he said. "And few men can maintain such a faith in the face of white public opinion at the South."

For the rest his address was largely a rearrangement of the speech he had delivered in Washington. His manner was dignified, earnest, and at times impassioned, yet it was always sufficiently restrained for the sober temper of his hearers. He gave point to utterances by making a direct appeal for aid in creating a public sentiment against lynching and the Jim Crow laws of the South as strong as the sentiment for abolition had been in the past.

"I am seeking to launch an idea," he said in conclusion. "If I succeed a great danger may be averted, for ideas are more potent than armies. Mistaken ideas have brought on wars, right ideas alone can prevent them. The actual menace which we face is ignorance; the world-old enemy of all mankind. Sweep away ignorance and prejudice must go with it. Remove prejudice and injustice loses its greatest bulwark. Service and good will lie only a little way beyond the horizon. I tell you, ladies and gentlemen, there is only one safe advance for individuals or nations; the progress of service. It is the highest form of human evolution; the greatest privilege of mankind."

He paused impressively.

"Have not my people served, faithfully, and silently, and long? Shall the good will which once filled their hearts, for even in the days of slavery it did fill many hearts among my people, shall good will be denied them, shall they be taught in a school of injustice that hatred is the only law?"

"He's a hit," Bamford wired to the office in New York as the audience was dispersing. "We'll be turning them away in New London. The best thing ever."

He signed the telegram "Bam" and hurried into the hotel bar for a highball, and then shot up in the elevator to the sixth floor to find Brent's rooms, there to pour his delight into his chief's willing ears.

Brent's willingness to be told exactly how great he was, and

what a hit he was, and what a sure thing he was, was in every sense equal to the demand Bamford's excited enthusiasm made upon it. It was nearly four o'clock before they separated, bosom friends, who now addressed each other as "Bam" and "General."

The following weeks proved what good cause the lecture bureau had to congratulate itself upon securing Brent's services. His success everywhere was phenomenal. Wherever he went great throngs heard him, great public receptions were tendered him, and he was the lion in private houses, where the most fashionable people crowded about him. His lithographs were to be seen on all the dead walls of the cities in which he appeared.

His spectacular success in Boston completed his triumph in New England. Not in years had any public speaker attracted such attention, aroused such enthusiasm, or received such an ovation. After Boston came Albany, Buffalo, Syracuse and Rochester, with many intermediate stops and divergencies. New York was to be reserved until midwinter. Brent was to make his first appearance there under the most favorable auspices, by invitation of a committee of distinguished philanthropists, at the very height of the season.

Brent was now exploited in the cheaper magazines as well as in the newspapers. And as time went on, Comorn Hall became a familiar object to the readers of Sunday supplements and illustrated literature in general. Editors of great journals telegraphed him for his opinion upon all race questions, or whenever a sensational riot or lynching became a feature of the news. Brent's name soon came to stand for good copy. Tutored by Bamford, he never refused himself to a reporter nor repudiated an interview.

"Get solid with the press, General," his agent told him, "and you'll keep solid with the country. It's the newspaper boys that make the big reputations every time."

Brent thrived on his success. He was a good traveler, and he found in Bamford a pleasant companion whom he soon came to regard with patronizing affection. For his part,

Bamford thought "the general" a great man. The agent dined with his chief every day. For, as he explained to inquiring friends, "Why, hell, boys, if the president could do it I guess it won't turn my stomach. Worrying about my social position? Say, search me."

He smoked Brent's cigars; he showed him off; he wrote him up with unfailing enthusiasm and a genuine fondness for his subject which was contagious.

Brent reveled in that steady flow of fame which is only to be secured by the services of an able and assiduous press representative. He heard Bamford's rough drafts of his notices with delight and he sometimes made a shrewd suggestion which heightened their effect. His familiarity with their creation did not lessen in the least degree the rich satisfaction with which he reread them when they appeared in the papers where Bamford "planted" them.

On the long railway journeys "Bam" overflowed with anecdotes of his picturesque career as the guide, philosopher and friend of the various "prominent characters" his lecture bureau had seen fit to exploit during the last ten years.

"I had to appear myself one night as Doctor Silenius, the great Arctic and Antarctic explorer," he told Brent as they lounged in the smoking car on their way from Detroit to Montreal. "The pole-buster, I called him. Doc got drunk and nothing would sober him up. I gave him everything I could think of from A to Z and some more besides. But it didn't rouse him. The house was sold out and, say, we needed the money. I got busy, and when the time came I was all rigged out in Doc's polar bear costume. I knew the lecture by heart, and I'd got old Silenius' accent down fine. Say, they all thought I'd been born on an iceberg. So did I till I heard a racket and there, just ready to come out on the platform, was Doc himself, half sobered up, blazing mad, and ready to call the whole deal, if I hadn't had the presence of mind to have him arrested for causing a disturbance. Bailed him out the next morning and we jumped to Peoria.

"But Doc wasn't any good after that. My mistake. He'd

get full as a tick and go to bed and just say I did the lecture better than he did anyway. Said it didn't matter about the lithographs; when I got on the furs I looked lovely. I had to quit him after six weeks. Weather was getting hot and those clothes were worse than a Turkish bath.

"Mother came out to Patterson to hear Doc because I was piloting the old fakir, and when she saw me in that midwinter make-up doing his stunt she laughed so hard she had hysterics. Say, you know how it is. She gave a whoop, and she gave a gulp, and she got to laughing so she couldn't stop. Every time I opened my mouth she'd give a scream and off she'd go. The people out front got their money back at the door.

"The house manager wanted to have mama arrested for breaking up the lecture, but when he heard I was her own dear boy he thought he'd go after old Silenius for being drunk instead. And he did. Got an attachment. We closed right there. Doc went out two or three times after that, and every time he tried to work the same old dodge. But they all got on to him and he couldn't get a date. He's a barker down at Coney Island now, drawing good money, too.

"Say, General, did I ever tell you about Madame Retrex, the world's most wonderful soul psychic? She had a glass eye, and a false front, and her subject was material evidences of a spiritual world. I tell you the madame was hot stuff. Wherever she went she just raised blisters. She was a dream on the platform. She wore black velvet with one artificial red rose pinned on to her false front. As a spellbinder she hadn't her equal on the road. I always told her she ought to cut out lecturing and give 'em Lady Macbeth. She'd have made their hair stand on end, you bet your life she would. She liked the idea, too, and thought she'd do it, but she never did. Said she was a little dubious about the expression of her glass eye in the sleep-walking scene.

"She was the great original slate medium, and I tell you she was creepy in God-forsaken junction stations when we were waiting to make some change at two o'clock in the morning.

She'd start the windows rattling just to keep me awake so I'd talk to her or play poker with her on the top of my suit-case. She'd get most of my salary back that way. It was awful the way she'd look at me out of her glass eye while her good eye'd be taking in my cards.

"Say, she almost got me hypnotized. Said she'd adopt me. But say, I got on to her game. Wanted to cut my salary, and make me play the piano to save expense. But I fooled her. She ended the season way to the good and put her money into a patent corset company, and now she's president of the concern with a big factory over in Jersey City. She blows me off to a good dinner any day I'll cross the ferry. She's good friends with mama. But her bad eye makes me nervous."

Bam looked at his chief, his expectant grin inviting the other's laughter. But Brent was not listening. His thoughts were not of Doctor Silenius nor of Madame Retrex. In Detroit the day before he had received several disturbing letters from Virginia.

Brent had known from his wife's first letters that his messages and her entreaties had been without effect upon Eugene. The young man was unwilling to break off his engagement or to leave Northmoreland. But he was perfectly willing that his birth should be kept a secret from his white associates forever if his father desired.

Eugene's plan, Mrs. Brent wrote, was to go abroad as soon after the marriage as possible, and to remain there. He did not contemplate burying himself in Virginia with any satisfaction. He was sure he could win Polly and her mother to his plan and that they could persuade the judge to consent to it. In Paris he would be outside the danger zone of possible exposure.

It was with this talk of living abroad that Eugene had combatted all Mrs. Brent's arguments and put aside his father's protests. The wedding at Avalon was but a matter of weeks now, she wrote. It was to take place soon after the holidays, in January or February. Each day the situation was becoming more imperative, more critical.

It was all disquieting news. Brent raged at his wife inwardly and tried to convince himself that the fault was hers. If she had not raised this issue everything would have gone on quietly and well. Here was a situation which she was determined he should meet while his one desire was to evade it.

If exposure followed she alone would be to blame. He had charged her explicitly over and over again not to mention the matter in her letters for fear that they might fall into other hands than his.

He took up a book which lay upon the seat beside him and tried to forget his anxiety and irritation. But he could not. He looked over the contents of a long envelope full of press clippings, reports of his speeches, advance notices, editorials from negro papers. The last copy of Adriance's paper contained several columns of fulsome adulation. Brent read it all eagerly. It never occurred to him that it was too highly colored.

They were approaching Montreal. As they ran through the suburbs the glare of a street lamp, falling upon a bill-board, revealed one of his own lithographs. He was to lecture in the city the next night.

He was glad of the two or three reporters who called at the hotel to interview him, and was sorry when they had gone. Feeling lonely, he even tried to detain Bamford in his sitting-room. But the genial "Bam" had made an engagement, by telegraph, to attend the theater with a lady friend, and soon went off, leaving him huddled over the cheerful fire, discontented and sullen.

Alone, Brent reread his letters, answering those of his wife and daughter in the guarded tone which alone he considered safe. Concluding his task, he rose and tossed the letters from Comorn upon the fire, then, putting on his heavy fur-lined overcoat, he descended to the office, posted the letters which he had written, and passed out into the night.

The cold was sharp. The snow swirled and eddied about his well-wrapped, burly figure and, falling in thick flakes, blurred his vision. It was all familiar, all intimate. This city of his

adoption seemed more his than the far-away land of his birth. Yet his renunciation had been final. His future was not here. But alien as they now were to all his purposes, his affections were still keenly alive to the sights and sounds about him. The northern winter and the northern night embalmed a thousand recollections.

With lowered head Brent bent his steps toward the French quarter of the town in which his home had been for many years. As he plodded on he recognized each street and turning. The neighborhood was all ghastly familiar to him, and he stole along like a ghost that fears to wake the living lest they banish it again to the decencies of its tomb. He passed a chemist's on a corner. The lights were burning behind the great green and red bottles in the windows. The frost was not so thick on the glass that it hid from him the familiar features of the clerk behind the counter. He resisted an impulse to pause and enter the shop.

He was now only half a block from his old home. As he neared the door he saw there were lights in the windows, but the shades were drawn, seeming to shut him out in the stormy night.

A doctor's sign was still beside the door, but it no longer bore his name. The snow had been freshly trodden on the threshold. He looked up and down the street. Seeing no one, he mounted the steps and quickly slipping off his glove touched the door-knob, the knocker and the iron railings with his bare hand. Having paid this tribute of affection he descended the steps and hurried on. The metal was freezing cold and he was glad to draw his glove on again.

He was thinking now of his first wife, and of her father, the old French physician whose house this had been in his time. He thought of the birth of Eugene; of Hortense; and of his wife's death. Then he thought of his second marriage, and of Celia's birth.

Turning presently to retrace his steps that he might pass the house again, he almost jostled a muffled figure which went by him in a blinding swirl of snow. The man must have been

close at his heels, he thought. Yet he had not seen him when he paused before the steps of his old home.

He felt a strong desire to look back to see if the figure had turned to follow him, but he resisted the impulse. As he passed the chemist's on the corner he was aware that the muffled figure was close behind him. He heard no steps, he merely knew that he was followed.

Coming to a more frequented street he turned into it. Here the shop windows made the white pavement brilliant in patches. Still he was aware that he was followed.

At last, summoning all his resolution, he shook off his nervous dread and, pausing directly beneath a street lamp, faced about. The figure approached and passed him. Their eyes met. The recognition was complete, but neither spoke. He had been followed by John Brent.

Brent stood where he was beneath the street lamp until the younger man had passed from sight, then he made his way to his hotel without further adventure. His forebodings seemed to have found their realization in his meeting with the young Virginian.

In a sense he experienced a feeling of relief upon discovering who it was that had followed him. The negro in him shrank from encountering the unknown in any shape. It was of ill omen. But to meet John Brent on a winter's night in Montreal, while it boded him no good, was not a matter of sinister suggestion. Yet he only slept after hours of restless tossings, and then only to dream troubled dreams.

The next day he did not venture out of the hotel until it was time to drive to the hall where he was to deliver his address. Some friends had called in the afternoon and urged him to visit their homes, but he declined. They seemed very remote, he thought, from all his present interests. More than ever he was aware of the great changes which had taken place in his life. More than ever he acknowledged his willingness to accept them.

His lecture was largely attended, but he perceived at once that his topic was not the living thing it was south of the St.

Lawrence. These people, many of them old acquaintances or patients, had come to see him, not to hear him. The man interested them, they had a certain pride in his success, but the problem he propounded did not touch them vitally.

In the train the next morning, rushing westward to Chicago, he took up the papers with the usual pleasurable anticipations. He found long and friendly reviews of his address, a grave and serious consideration of the problem presented, but it was evident that his purchase of Comorn Hall, his reception at the White House, and his Black Crusade speech did not constitute any real claim to fame in Montreal. He had been received as an intelligent man, well informed upon a remote but interesting subject, not as the torch-bearer of a new crusade.

Taking up one of the papers again an item at the foot of a column caught his eye. A negro convention was to be held in New Orleans, and some fear was expressed that a clash of the races might result, as many of the subjects which would come up for discussion were considered inflammatory.

Brent pondered a moment. Then he swung his chair about until he faced Bamford.

"Look here. Read that," he said, and pointed to the obscure paragraph.

Bamford took the paper and read the item.

"Well, General, I don't see any notice in that for us," the agent said as he returned the paper.

"I do," Brent replied laconically. "And I'm going to New Orleans to address that convention."

"What!" cried Bamford, his eyes staring with surprise. "Why, that's a side-show. That isn't your size, General. A big man like you can't afford to appear in a little one-horse thing like that."

"It won't be so little, or so one-horse, when I get down there," Brent answered with significance. "Where am I booked for those dates?"

"Out through Wisconsin. Good towns, all of them."

"Sorry, but we've got to cancel, that's all. I'll go up there later."

"I suppose the dates might be shifted," Bamford admitted reluctantly. "But what's the use of going to New Orleans now? You know the folks back at the office in New York wouldn't book you anywhere south of Washington, or the Ohio River. They didn't think it would be safe."

"I don't care whether it's safe or not," Brent said with grim decision. "I'm going. And I'll pay my own expenses, and yours, too, if you'll go along. But I don't want you to go if you're nervous about it," he added kindly.

"Me nervous," exclaimed his representative. "Why, good lord, General, I like a little excitement, and I like it served red-hot. You'll be the only one who is taking chances. If you go you'd better get your health insured." And Bamford grinned knowingly. "There's likely to be trouble when you hand it to them about race equality and Jim Crow legislation way down in old Louisiana."

"There'll be no great amount of trouble except in the papers," Brent asserted. "And that's just where we need it. You can see by these notices the Canadians don't think I'm in earnest. And there've been others like them. Plenty of people seem to think I'm only in this business for what I can get out of it. The country's got to be convinced of my sincerity before I make my first appearance in New York. You wire the folks in the office to shift the Wisconsin dates and I'll wire those people in New Orleans that I'm coming down with my sleeves rolled up to the shoulder to help them in their fight."

"Say," said Bamford, his eyes lighting as he approached a full realization of the advertising opportunities this daring and disinterested action of his chief held out. "Say, Chicago ought to know about this. I'll telegraph from the next stop that you've canceled a week of dates to carry the war right into the enemy's country. Sleeves rolled up to the shoulder. Say, that's bully. Hell, I'll rub it in. I'll tell how the biggest kind

of guarantee couldn't keep you on the lecture beat when you saw a chance to unfurl the flag of freedom in the stronghold of oppression. Say, I'll drop a hint that all the big insurance companies refused to take a risk on you if you went south of Mason and Dixon's line. That the minute you cross it your insurance lapses." Already he was busy with his pencil making notes.

"But I don't carry any insurance on my life," Brent told him.

"Well," said Bamford indifferently, "you ought to, anyway."

He wrote telegrams steadily for half an hour. Several were from famous persons urging Doctor Brent not to subject himself needlessly to the perils of mob violence by carrying the banner of the Black Crusade into New Orleans.

Brent felt constrained to modify Bamford's program, but enough of the agent's large intentions remained to enable him, as he tersely put it, "to throw a good stiff fit into Chicago."

Bamford's fertility of invention was a constant source of mingled wonder and delight to Brent. The great man was shrewd enough to see that his agent made the most of every opportunity to exploit him, and he valued him accordingly.

Following upon the waves of sensation which Bamford radiated over the wires at regular intervals Brent's success in Chicago was phenomenal. Here again he found his topic vital. Here again he was cheered to the echo by huge audiences when he enunciated the noble principles which underlay the Black Crusade he preached so eloquently.

He was compelled to appear in the afternoons, as well as at night, to satisfy the demand of the crowds eager to see and hear him before he went south to the land of the Jim Crow law and the lynching mob.

The New Orleans papers resented the intimation, which Bamford had taken pains to circulate, that Doctor Brent would not be safe in their city. He would be perfectly safe, they protested, so long as he conducted himself with propriety, and he would be free to express any opinions he might entertain. Speech was as free in the South as it was in the

North. They considered Brent merely a clever and unscrupulous opportunist who was seeking to foist himself upon the public. But unless he overstepped the law he would be as safe in New Orleans as he was in Chicago.

Bamford fairly wallowed in Brent's success. He accompanied the great man to receptions. He was with him when at Springfield the Senate adjourned that its members might have the honor of shaking Doctor Brent by the hand. After Springfield they hurried on to St. Paul and Minneapolis, to Omaha, and Lincoln, and Denver, and then turned eastward to St. Louis. After St. Louis, New Orleans was to follow and the South itself was to have an opportunity to see and hear the Black Crusader.

CHAPTER XXXV

IN THE ENEMY'S COUNTRY

In St. Louis Brent encountered the first serious opposition. A demonstration was made against him as he was returning from the hall in which his address had been delivered. He was hooted in the streets, and a missile broke a window of his carriage before the police could disperse the angry rabble which followed him.

"I don't half like this, General," Bamford said when they were safe inside the house of the respectable negro who had offered Brent his hospitality. "What do you think about New Orleans now?"

"Fiddle!" Brent replied, snapping his fingers. "The worse they treat me down there the better I'll like it. That's what I'm going for. I'm not afraid of them. The New Orleans papers say the city can protect me. Let them. It's their job. I'm not worrying about it."

The journey south was not destined to be uneventful. They left St. Louis on the night train, Bamford having secured the stateroom in the Pullman for his chief. Brent, heavily muffled from the winter night, had boarded the train with Bamford, without his identity becoming known to the Pullman conductor, to whom Bamford surrendered his tickets, nor to any of his fellow passengers, most of whom were already sleeping soundly behind the curtains which Brent brushed softly as he followed Bamford and the porter along the dimly-lighted aisle to the door of their stateroom.

If the porter knew or suspected that the gentleman with the soft hat drawn down over his eyes and the fur collar turned up about his ears, was the famous negro leader, he was careful to make no sign.

It was not until the next morning when he entered the dining-car with Bamford that Brent's presence was discovered. Here the waiters, instructed by the conductor, refused to serve him and, after a futile protest, Brent returned to his stateroom.

There was an ominous pause in hostilities. Then a belligerent knock sounded upon his door and the conductor of the Pullman entered, followed by the conductor of the train.

They had come, they said, to request Brent to leave the Pullman at once and to take a seat in the day coach reserved for negroes. The railroad, they told him, was liable to a heavy penalty for any violation of the separate coach law.

"I have no intention whatever of leaving this stateroom until we reach New Orleans," Brent answered. "I have paid for it, I have a right to the use of the space for which I have paid and I will not surrender it. My presence need not distress any of my white fellow passengers, any more than their presence distresses me. We can not even see each other when the door of this stateroom is closed. I'm sorry to put you to any inconvenience, gentlemen; I understand your position perfectly. You are paid to enforce the rules of the company, but some one must be a pioneer in these matters. The trouble is not with me. It's with your laws. They are unconstitutional. Repeal them and you won't be bothered in this way."

When the conductor intimated that Brent would have no choice but to obey the law, the latter warned him that he could only be removed by force, and that if such an attempt were made he would resist. Moreover he would institute suit against any individual who ventured to lay hands on him as well as against the railroad.

The conductors withdrew and held a consultation with their allies. When they returned they found the door locked and the only response they received when they shouted through the panel was the information that Doctor Brent was resting and could not be disturbed.

At Baton Rouge an important official of the railway who had been notified by telegram boarded the train. But his

efforts to remove Brent were unsuccessful. To force the door of the stateroom would have been easy. But it might involve new problems and nice questions of the law. Brent was too well known, and the ear of the press too attentive to his voice, for it to be wise or even safe to subject him to gross indignity or to rough handling. The train could not be held long enough for instructions to be received from the president of the line, so a compromise was effected. An empty Pullman was attached and all the passengers in Brent's coach were transferred to it; and Brent and his agent proceeded to their destination undisturbed.

Here the incident might have ended, as the railway officials would have been glad to hush the matter up, but the delegation of representative negroes which met Brent at the station, together with his highly incensed white fellow passengers, and the ubiquitous Bamford, soon spread the story broadcast.

The papers took it up and, much to the chagrin of the city officials, who had desired to ignore his presence, Brent was arrested. Bail was fixed, and furnished, and the hero of the episode was at liberty to enjoy the harvest of sensational heralding which paid tribute to his arrival in the enemy's country.

"It isn't such a little convention, after all, is it, Bam?" Brent asked his agent when they were enjoying their ease in the comfortable quarters furnished by the reception committee.

"Say, General, who put you on to this game, anyhow?" the admiring Bamford asked. "Every man in the business is a child to you. Say, there isn't another advertiser living that can hold a candle to you. I wouldn't have seen anything in that little squib in the paper, but it hit you in the eye. Say, this is the biggest thing yet. But say, General, I'll be glad to get you out of this burgh alive, and me too. I don't know what mother'd think of this," he added dubiously.

"Don't you worry about our being safe," Brent replied confidently. "The mayor and the chief of police will look out for that. They have the good name of the city to consider."

"Don't you think you might take a few reefs in your speech, General?" Bamford suggested after a pause, with a hint of ill-concealed anxiety. "There is no use throwing red-hot coals on top of dynamite unless you like an explosion."

"I know just exactly what I'm going to do about that speech," the great man answered, and his tone conveyed the impression that upon this point he was not open to suggestions from his agent.

When Brent appeared in court the next day he was accompanied by the most brilliant negro attorney in New Orleans, who made a brief defense. His fine was the lightest which could be imposed for such an offense. As he left the court room he was surrounded by policemen and detectives who did not leave him until they had seen him safely within his own door.

All this found its way into the columns of the press, and when the hour for opening the convention arrived, the streets for blocks in every direction were massed with police and mounted city guards. The governor of the state had telegraphed the mayor to prevent a riot at all hazards.

The mayor would have closed the convention on the ground that it was against the public welfare had not the pride of the city been at stake.

"You see what free speech on the race question means in a southern city," Brent said to his lieutenant, as they made their way through the crowded streets in a closed carriage, escorted by a squadron of police. "That is, if you're on the black side of the question."

"For God's sake you'll go easy, General?" Bamford pleaded. "You're only one man against a hundred thousand. Don't forget that."

"It doesn't look to me as if I had much to fear," Brent answered, glancing from the carriage window at his escort. "Let the mayor of the city do the worrying to-night. It's his business to keep order, not mine. There isn't a man that can get more scared than I can, or run faster, when I start to run, but I've got to have a reason for it. You'll be

glad of every howl you hear to-night, and every stone that's thrown, when you read the northern papers. They'll drop that talk that I'm only out for money. I want people to know once and for all that I'm in earnest."

"I'll be a damn sight gladder when we hit the trail back to God's country," Bamford groaned. "Say, I don't want to hear them howl. I'm ready to run now. Oh, mama; mama!"

It was not mere bravado which prompted Brent to speak as he did. Somewhere in the hidden depths of his nature there was a gleam of savage courage, of animal ferocity, of which, hitherto, he had been unaware. It now roused within him like a strong ally coming at the call of danger. He felt it and was strengthened by it.

They found the church packed to its utmost limits. The air was electric with repressed excitement. It was evident that trouble was expected and that many courted it.

Police were stationed at the doors to maintain order. Reporters were grouped at one side of the raised platform. There was a situation and a setting, and Brent, as he entered and moved to his place beside the speaker's table, was aware that the chief figure of the occasion was worthy of both.

The chairman who presided and whose duty it was to introduce the speaker was an ex-senator of the Reconstruction era. He spoke briefly. His native eloquence sat at the feet of the police rather than soared to its accustomed heights. He, too, evidently labored under great and painful anxiety. He thanked their distinguished guest for having left his lucrative appointments in the North to take the long journey south to meet with them here to-night. He regretted that any unfortunate events had occasioned Doctor Brent inconvenience. But he wished to remind his hearers that it was no part of their policy, nor the part of wisdom, to oppose the operation of the laws under which they lived.

He was for cultivating friendly relations with the dominant race at almost any cost. Having trailed the white feather in the dust, he sat down, equally disconcerted and discredited.

Brent rose slowly, a sarcastic smile twitching his heavy lips, his bearing bold and confident.

"Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen," he began, in a quiet, almost conversational tone, "I have come to New Orleans at some cost to myself to express to you my honest convictions regarding the most vital interests of our race. It is not my intention to arouse passion. I am not here to excite to riot and mob violence, as many seem to believe; I am here to consider with you, seriously and temperately, the great problems which confront our race. Free speech hurts no one. If this constitutes a grave misdemeanor, then God pity us and our children.

"Mr. Chairman, in introducing me to this assembly you alluded to an unfortunate event which had occasioned me some inconvenience on my journey to New Orleans. And you suggested that it was not the part of wisdom to oppose the operation of the laws under which we live here at the South.

"It had not been my intention to refer to an incident so unimportant, but since it has been mentioned I will say to you, Mr. Chairman, and to you, ladies and gentlemen, that I yield to no man in my respect for just laws. I am an upholder of the law. I am opposed to lawlessness in all its forms, legalized and otherwise. But, Mr. Chairman and ladies and gentlemen, from time to time in the history of states and nations it has been found wise, expedient and necessary to revise and amend the laws upon the statute books.

"Well, ladies and gentlemen, and you, Mr. Chairman, it seems to me that the time is coming—I might say that the time has come—when the so-called Jim Crow laws of the southern states should be erased, once and forever erased, from the statute books of these great states. I am for no compromise. I am for no half measures. I say the time is coming, that the hour draws near, when all such laws will be as obsolete in every state in the Union as the laws relating to slavery now are. They are iniquitous and they must pass away.

"I wish to say that I have no quarrel whatever with those

who are compelled to enforce these laws. It is the spirit of injustice in which they had their inception that I challenge. In the last court of equity the framers of such laws stand guilty, not those whose sworn duty it is to enforce them, nor those who feel it equally their duty to combat them. All barriers must be cast from the path of justice. Sane men do not obey insane laws; they amend them.

"It was in such a spirit that I acted when I refused to leave the stateroom on my journey from St. Louis to New Orleans. I felt it was my duty to assert in my own case my serious convictions, to register my individual protest against the injustice, the malice and the short-sightedness of such laws.

"That these laws are as short-sighted as they are indefensible there can be no doubt. The legislation which has as its aim the holding back and degradation of any class of citizens is unworthy the name of legislation. Such laws are in themselves illegal and can only be entered upon the statute books to be struck off again.

"It is, after all, upon the fundamental principles of law that states must rely to maintain order in the last analysis. A vigilant, rigid and impartial enforcement of the law for black and white alike is as inevitable as it is just. Let the individual transgressor suffer for his individual transgression. Do not hobble a race because one man goes lame.

"If God in His wisdom has really set us apart from our white brothers we shall remain apart. If God has not decreed our separation it is futile to erect a wall about us. We shall surmount it sooner or later, however high it is.

"I will now, ladies and gentlemen, and you, Mr. Chairman, address myself to the plain task which brought me here."

Then, without any modification whatever, but in a level argumentative tone, avoiding all dramatic forms of utterance, and all the arts of emotional appeal, he delivered the address which he had evolved from its beginnings in Convention Hall.

The chairman sat terror-stricken at the boldness of the speaker. Bamford's face was pale and drawn with anxiety,

but every negro in his audience saw in Brent a new Moses who was to lead them into another Promised Land.

Brent left the church by a side door immediately after concluding his address. The police formed about his carriage and he was conducted to his lodging place in safety. He did not know that another carriage had been sent through different streets to entice the rabble away from the one which he occupied. But the next day he learned of the precautions which had been taken for his safety. Every window in the empty carriage was shattered, and the driver had been roughly handled by an angry mob before his rescue could be effected by the police.

The newspapers devoted columns to Brent's address. Reporters were in his rooms the next morning seeking interviews when a mob of the baser sort of negro-hating whites, eager for any diversion, gathered before the house where he lodged, broke the windows and terrorized the neighborhood, and threatened to proceed to more serious business, when the police appeared in force, and, after a brief skirmish, routed them. Guards were then placed at the street corners with orders to turn back all who could not give a satisfactory account of themselves.

Throughout the excitement Brent remained calm and unmoved. He never for one moment thought himself in danger. He knew the city would protect him, and it did. But before order was restored one white man and two negroes had been killed; harmless non-combatants, struck by stones and trampled down.

"You've drawn blood, General," Bamford said, after he had reported this information to his chief.

"I'm sorry to hear that," Brent answered. But there was a light in his eyes as he walked to the shattered window and looked out which sorrow had not kindled there.

"How are we going north, General?" the agent asked with some anxiety.

"There has been an offer of a special train by some Chicago

friends. I had a telegram about it half an hour ago. But I declined it. I'm going north in a day coach this time, I'm going to travel with the other niggers."

"But how about me?" Bamford interjected.

"You'd better reserve a berth in the Pullman, for, even if you cared to try it, they wouldn't let you travel in the nigger coach."

"Then I'll sit up in the smoker," said the faithful henchman.

And so it was that Doctor Brent left New Orleans in the common day coach reserved for negroes, while Bamford, with penitential loyalty, abjured the comforts of the Pullman.

There was much jeering and laughter on the part of the white passengers when they learned that the great negro agitator had been relegated to his "proper place." They preferred to disbelieve the report Bamford took pains to circulate, that Doctor Brent had declined to accept a special train which had been put at his disposal by northern friends and chose to share the hardships forced upon his own race that he might the better understand them.

Brent, altogether indifferent to the opinions of the whites, at once made friends with those about him. He was glad of the opportunity to learn at first hand something of the impression which his course had made upon the negro rank and file. Luxury-loving as he was, he bore with patience and good nature the discomforts of the crowded day coach, and found his compensation in the open awe, homage and admiration which were accorded him.

If the journey to New Orleans had been eventful, the journey north was more memorable and for a very different reason. Ten hours out of New Orleans, at one o'clock in the morning, in a desolate region, the train by which Brent traveled was derailed and hurled from the track. Three of the coaches were overturned, while others were crumpled and crushed as though they had been flimsy pasteboard boxes. Fire breaking out added its horrors to the catastrophe.

Although severely wrenched and bruised, Brent extricated

himself from the wreck, and, finding Bamford unharmed, threw himself heart and soul into the work of rescuing the living from the burning coaches. This task accomplished, he bent his energies to alleviating the sufferings of those who had been injured.

When at last a relief train reached the scene of accident, and Brent relinquished his charge and took his place in the coach reserved for negroes he carried with him the admiration and gratitude of all his fellow passengers, black or white.

Again fate had been with him, and once more his well-known name rang through the land, and now no voice of detraction was raised to belittle his heroic efforts. The southern press vied with the press of the North in expressions of appreciation and respect.

But this time fate exacted a price. Brent never walked again without a limp, and he was grateful for the support of a stout cane which Bamford bought for him.

In a sense his lameness only added to his impressiveness whenever he rose and moved forward to address an audience, and the cane which Bamford gave him was soon replaced by one of ebony mounted in heavy gold which his grateful fellow travelers caused to be purchased and presented to him.

After two days' rest in Vicksburg the great man resumed his journey. Altogether he had been well repaid for his visit to New Orleans.

As they sped northward Bamford's spirits rose, and he was soon keeping the wires hot at every stop they made, working up his chief's appearance in New York. That long anticipated event now loomed very large and near. And Brent, bathed in his own glory, read and reread the newspaper reports of his experiences in New Orleans with the delight of a child and the calculation of a man.

More than ever he appreciated that he had the game in his hands. He saw that he could stimulate public interest in himself at any moment he chose. He could keep himself perpetually before the people. The cause with which he had identified himself held unlimited possibilities. Mrs. Delafield

had been right; it was but for him to choose. Fortune can be as swift as fate in her selections. Fortune had chosen Brent as her favorite. If fate looked on derisively Brent was not more blind than others.

The man's amazing faculty for keeping himself before the country had begun to impress even those who at first dismissed his pretensions with a word. Politicians north and south were becoming uneasy. Neither of the great parties could count upon his allegiance. His subserviency was not to be hoped for. In the southern states his meteoric career was reflected in the increasing restlessness and aggressiveness of the blacks. The voice of detraction had been more potent than the voice of praise. The southern press had not spent its fury in vain. It had convinced the negro that Brent was feared and hated by the southern whites. The endorsement was beyond all price.

Slowly a definite policy was shaping in his mind, a bold policy which the trend of circumstances suggested to him.

He had the wisdom to perceive that while his people, as individuals, were for the most part miserably poor, yet in the aggregate they were immensely rich. He saw that not one penny need be asked in charity if the real wealth of the negro could be organized. Out of their labor he knew they paid for all that they received, and for much besides which came back in the shape of alms. The negro race should finance its own progress. That was to be a cardinal maxim with him henceforth. He resisted all appeals to turn his popularity into a collecting agency for negro schools and hospitals. He said he had no desire, for himself or for his people, to put his fingers into any white man's pocket. He declined a large sum offered by a northern millionaire, who had suggested placing it in his hands to be distributed to worthy negro institutions throughout the South. He declined to act on the board of trustees for a great endowment fund for negro education.

His course was viewed with astonishment until his purpose became known, then with dismay. He spent hours and hours

dreaming and figuring upon a scheme of finance by which the negro dollar should take to itself the magic of the white man's dollar.

He saw great institutions, banks, insurance companies, a whole system of finance, built on racial lines. He saw millions on millions withdrawn from the hands of the white man and entrusted to the hands of black financiers. And he saw how easily his dream might become a reality.

The entire financial system of the nation had been re-created since the Civil War. His own years of activity might suffice to bring about a vast economic revolution.

Out of the poverty of the negro race he would forge a huge trust which should deal in billions, and whose heavy hand should be his hand. He smiled when he thought of the post at Haiti which had been offered him as the price of his allegiance.

They had bought his ancestors with a string of beads, a rifle or a cotton handkerchief, perhaps, but he set a higher value on himself. He became so excited that he telegraphed to Adriance to meet him in Philadelphia to talk the matter over. He felt that New York was the city where he must first enunciate his new doctrine. A new financial program would interest New York. He confided his ideas to Mrs. Delafield in a long letter.

In Cincinnati Brent received Mrs. Delafield's reply. She commended his courage. She was in hearty accord with the new policies he was enunciating. For an hour his remembrance of her, vivified by the letter in his hand, cast its strong spell upon him.

The something in her nature which craved supreme experiences found an echo in his own desires. His reply was tinged with a sense of the romantic nature of their friendship. He wrote that her approval was the best gift which the white race could make him; and he assured her that she was the inspiration of his brief public career.

Mrs. Delafield shuddered at this frank avowal, but her fortitude, when summoned, enabled her to peruse this portion of

Brent's letter more than once. Mrs. Delafield, as she often assured herself, was always willing to face realities. It was eventualities which caused her at times to hesitate. The future was so illusive, so mysterious, she told her friends. She did not often willingly lay pitfalls in the path which she would traverse on the morrow.

A few days later Brent was glad to find himself in Cleveland with only Pittsburgh and Philadelphia intervening between his ambitions and his New York appearances. He was busy preparing his speech for Carnegie Hall.

It was while Brent was in Cleveland that Mrs. Brent arrived from Comorn. Her coming was unexpected. Brent found her waiting for him in the parlor of the hotel when he returned from a visit to the schools of the city. She looked pale, he thought, and even haggard.

"Why, Molly," he cried, "you're the last person in the world I expected to find here. Is anything wrong at home? Celia? Hortense?"

She shook her head, and at once he knew the errand which had brought her.

CHAPTER XXXVI

A FRUITLESS ERRAND

Brent saw that his wife was laboring under a great strain which showed in every line of her worn and haggard face, and in her troubled eyes. Affairs at Comorn were critical in the extreme, she told him, when they were safe beyond hearing in his rooms. Eugene had absolutely refused to be dissuaded from his purpose.

"I sent for him by your mother," Mrs. Brent began. "When he came I repeated all that you had said. But nothing had the least effect. He will not believe that your opposition to his course is serious. Both he and his sister are intoxicated by your success. I can not convince them that all your fame, all this awful publicity, will only make the exposure more terrible. There is no time now to temporize or delay. You must come home at once and put this matter right. I can not rest till it is done. Julius, you will go at once? You'll do your duty now before it is too late?"

Brent listened in ominous silence. For the first time since she had left Comorn a dread that her mission might fail stole into her heart and chilled it with a great fear. She saw that her demand had angered him.

"Duty," he cried, "don't talk nonsense to me about my duty. If I did my duty I'd not lift a hand to stop that wedding. I've a duty to my people, haven't I? I've a duty to Eugene! Duty! Duty! When have the Beckfords ever thought of their duty to my people? When have they ever spared us, or spared our women? But I've got to think of my duty, have I?"

He rose and paced the room. He did not trust himself to speak again until he could master the dull anger which

had been his only real response to his wife's pleadings. He wished to rage out against her, and against all her race, that by so doing he could deaden the voice of his own conscience. Her coming had stripped him of his self-deceptions, laid bare his secret purposes, destroyed his self-complacency, brought him abruptly to a parting of the ways where he must definitely choose his path.

But even in his anger he tried to cover the naked wrong of his intention, to tell himself that he was angry with his wife, not because she had unmasked him to himself, but because she had sought to bring him into conflict with his children. He was angry with her, too, because what she proposed would interrupt his tour at its most critical moment. He would be forced to abandon, or at least postpone, his lectures in Philadelphia and perhaps his appearance in New York. He wished to follow up boldly with his new theories of finance the great impression he had already made. His tour was approaching its zenith and yet his wife wished him to turn aside for the sake of her scruples. He could not do it.

If he returned to Comorn now he must either break off the marriage, exposing his son if need be, as his wife did not hesitate to urge, or forever be held fully responsible for whatever results followed the event.

But it was no easy task, either to calm Mrs. Brent or to convince her that he was still master of the situation. He would forbid the marriage positively. That he promised her. Then if Eugene still refused it would be time enough to think of returning to Comorn.

"You trust me, Molly," he urged, eager to gain time by any plausible pretext or appeal. "You just trust to me and leave this matter in my hands. I'll attend to it, but you've got to let me do it in my own way. I thought you'd want to hear all about New Orleans and about our trip north, and how I got this game leg of mine; and I want to hear about Celia and all the news from home."

For the moment Mrs. Brent held her peace, while she listened with concern to her husband's account of his experiences

in New Orleans and of the accident in which he had figured with so much credit to himself.

His lameness aroused her solicitude, and she seemed to forget the imminence of the peril which she had left Comorn to avert. A careless word recalled it to her.

"Some of these days, Molly," Brent said, "things will be changed. Don't you worry. There's a time coming when they'll be proud enough to own me even down there in Virginia. And then my boy Gene and his wife will be driving over from Avalon to pay their respects and to let us see how their children are growing up."

"Their children," echoed the pale woman who stood looking from the window down upon the wintry city streets where heavy snowflakes powdered the hurrying multitude. "Their children! Judge Beckford's daughter would kill her children with her own hands before she would let one of them grow up with the taint of negro blood upon it. You know she would. And there isn't a white woman reared as she has been who'd blame her."

"What do you mean?" Brent rose heavily from his chair and moved toward her loweringly. "You'd better take care how you talk to me. Your own child has my blood in its veins, don't forget that, and you knew what I was when you married me."

"Yes, I knew," she answered. She paused and looked at him searchingly. "Julius, have you told me the truth? Do you really intend to stop that marriage? Or have you only told me these things to prevent me from doing what you will not do?"

"Haven't I told you I'm going to stop it?" he cried with fierce impatience. "What more can I say? What more do you want?"

"I want to be certain, I want to be convinced," she answered, stubborn and angry in her turn. "Why did you speak of Eugene's driving to Comorn from Avalon? Why did you speak of their children? It must have been in your mind."

"Why shouldn't he marry her after a while?" he parried.

"I said I'd stop it now. I didn't say I could prevent its ever taking place. If she loves him she won't give him up just because he is my son. You wouldn't object to their marrying if she knew him to be Eugene Brent and not Eugene Raymond?"

"No, if she knew and then chose to marry him I wouldn't have a word to say, not a word. But to let this thing go on while she doesn't know would be worse than to kill her. Julius, are you sure you can force Eugene to give her up? Are you absolutely sure?"

"Don't you worry about that," he answered roughly. "I've told you that's my affair."

"But I must worry. I can't quiet my conscience. I feel I must do something to make sure. If I thought you were deceiving me I would write to Judge Beckford before I sleep to-night. It would be my duty. I wouldn't care what the consequences were."

He stared at her frowning.

"What put that idea into your head—of writing to Judge Beckford?" he demanded.

She faced him fearlessly.

"It's not a new idea with me. It has been my settled purpose from the first unless you yourself will interfere. I tell you I can't rest till I am sure."

He controlled himself with an effort.

"Do you want to upset me so I can't lecture to-night?" he fretted. "Do you want to spoil my whole career with your senseless fears and nagging? Can't you be satisfied when I tell you again and again I'll attend to it, that I'll stop it? Eugene is my son, don't forget that, and I'll settle this matter in my own way. You mustn't meddle with this. This rests between me and my boy."

"But you promised me to prevent it long ago. You knew how I felt there in Washington when we talked it all over."

"I tell you now that I will prevent it," he said.

"You give me your word of honor?" she insisted.

"Yes, I do," he answered grudgingly.

Mrs. Brent made no further allusion to the wedding. But

her husband was aware he had not convinced her of his sincerity, and, fearful that she might in the extremity of her anxiety write to Judge Beckford, he decided upon a course which he hoped might allay her suspicions and put her fears finally at rest.

Hortense had mentioned in a recent letter that her brother thought of going to New York to make some purchases before his marriage. Mrs. Brent apparently was ignorant of his intention.

Brent wrote to Hortense immediately, cautiously, informing her of the state of affairs and asking that Eugene meet him in Pittsburgh without delay and without fail. Seeing Eugene there it would be an easy matter to convince Mrs. Brent that he had really abandoned his purpose and had left Northmoreland permanently.

The more Brent thought of this plan the better he liked it. If Eugene joined him in Pittsburgh he could always claim that he had sent for his son to persuade him to give up all idea of the marriage, and that he believed he had been successful.

In Pittsburgh two days later a telegram was delivered to Brent in his rooms.

"On my way. Shall regard your wishes. See you in Pittsburgh to-night." It was signed "Gene" and had been sent from Washington.

"I hope that satisfies you, Molly," Brent said as he handed the message to his wife. "That looks a little bit as if Gene still had some regard for my wishes, doesn't it? I don't say I blame you, but I do say you've been overanxious, as I've told you. Perhaps you still think you can not trust me to keep my word and that you'd better write to Judge Beckford after all?"

"No," Mrs. Brent replied, "if Eugene meets you in Pittsburgh I shall be satisfied. He wouldn't do that unless he meant to be governed by your wishes. Julius, I can't tell you how thankful I am for this."

Eugene met his father that night in his hotel where he had

registered under an assumed name. After an hour's conference Brent left his son alone for a few moments. When he returned Mrs. Brent accompanied him.

Eugene, the great man told his wife, was leaving in the morning for New York; from there he meant to sail for Liverpool. He would write to Polly Beckford from New York making some excuse for his abrupt departure. Then, when he was safe in England, he could definitely break off the engagement because of family opposition to his marriage.

"After all the governor knew best," Eugene acquiesced carelessly. "Perhaps it was taking too many chances; anyway it's all off now and I've decided to take my wedding trip alone." And he laughed his gay irresponsible laugh.

The next morning Eugene left Pittsburgh for New York, promising to telegraph his father the moment he determined the date of his sailing.

When Mrs. Brent knew that Eugene was on his way to New York, her first impulse was to return to Comorn to Celia; but Brent dissuaded her.

"No, no," he said. "You've got to stay with me a while, Molly, and quit your worrying. I don't want you to go back till this matter has all blown over, and not then till I can go with you. You needn't be anxious about Celia and Hortense; mother's staying at the Hall, Eugene told me, to be company for them. And I'm going to ask Hortense to invite Mrs. Mamie Ann Dandridge to spend a week at Comorn. Adriance is coming on to Philadelphia to have a talk with me and I'd like to show his sister some attention. So you make up your mind just to settle down with me for a few weeks anyhow."

To these arrangements, little as she approved of them, Mrs. Brent made no protest. A telegram from Eugene giving the date of his sailing put her last latent fears at rest. Only when the burden of her anxiety had lifted was she aware how great its weight had been.

Philadelphia gave Doctor Brent a splendid welcome. Bamford was enthusiastic and exhausted his adjectives in telegrams to the office in New York.

"You can't stop us. Turning them away. We are the real thing. Wait till we hit Gotham."

In Philadelphia Brent was joined by Adriance who told him that he had just succeeded in selling his paper, the *Richmond Trumpet*, and that his plan was to locate in New York and immediately begin the publication of a new weekly, which he meant to call the *Crusader* and which should be the organ of Brent's policies and for which he sought Brent's interest and support.

The Brents, accompanied by Adriance and Bamford, reached New York in a blizzard. The whole country was in a grip of ice. From the South came reports of falling temperature, deep snows, great drifts and bitter winds. Telegraph and telephone wires were down in all directions; trains, if they came in at all, were many hours delayed.

CHAPTER XXXVII

AT AVALON

In Virginia the snow lay white and deep over the mountains, white and deep over the low lands of Tide-Water. Bitter winds swept up the great ice-fields of the mighty rivers which the frost had locked from shore to distant shore. Wharves were deserted, travel ceased, and every living thing sought shelter; the foxes in their dens, the partridges in their thick coverts, the field mice in nests beneath the fodder shocks. Not a buzzard wheeled. Horses and cattle were close pent and deeply bedded; in every cabin a fire roared, hearths were heaped high with blazing logs, stoves were red-hot, and yet the frost was at the elbow, crowd as one would toward the heat.

A keen wind whistled through the gaunt trees and about the tall chimneys of Comorn Hall. It rattled the warped weatherboarding at Piccadilly, and blew the dead wood out of the old locust trees. It swirled the snow in eddies on the frozen beach and banked high drifts before Doctor Carniel's gate at the Cross Roads, and half hid the grimy front of Jake Yutsy's blacksmith shop. The door of Murphy Bird's house was lost behind a mound of snow, and that gentleman came and went through a window on his scouting expeditions in search of the woodpile. Even Grandpa Bird could not remember a time when the frost had been so severe, the snow so deep, or the ice so thick.

It was across this strange white land that Avalon sent out its hospitable summons, and in answer came carriages, wagons, coaches and sleighs battling through the drifts, passing along the frozen roads, bearing guests wrapped to the very eyes to the marriage of Polly Beckford and Eugene Raymond.

At Avalon the winter was beyond the windows only. No vestige or suggestion of it was permitted within doors. The

great house was already filled to overflowing with guests, who, coming from a distance, had arrived before the ice closed the river. Others who had delayed were now despaired of as there was little chance that even the boldest would attempt to get through from Fredericksburg, the nearest railway station, fifty miles away over roads now almost impassable. Telephone communication even was cut off. Mrs. Beckford could not be thankful enough that Eugene had returned from New York before the blizzard broke.

It was to be an evening wedding, but in the early afternoon the guests from the neighborhood began to take the road fearing the darkness might delay them altogether. The snow was falling again and a high wind made the way more difficult.

Viewed from without, Avalon showed little sign of the warmth and glow within; its dark red walls rose, massive and many-windowed, with somber dignity out of the drifting snow, which swirling across its broad front clung to the window sills and cornices.

"I do wish the windows wouldn't bang and rattle so," Polly said to Ada Beverley, as the two girls stood looking out into the closing twilight. "If it keeps on like this your mother and Mrs. Washington will never get to Avalon. And if they don't bring him Watt will never come, and I did want him to be here to-night. Who ever heard windows bang and rattle so before? Ada, you don't think it's a bad sign, do you?" she asked anxiously.

"Of course not," Ada reassured her. "Don't be foolish, Polly. It's just a splendid stormy winter's night. Mother and Aunt Maria and Watt will soon be here. I wanted them to come first, but as Agnes and I were to be bridesmaids they sent us on with Cousin Page. I expect to see Uncle Jim's horses plodding through the snow at any minute now."

"I do hope Watt comes," Polly said wistfully. "You don't mind my speaking to you about Watt, do you, Ada? You know it was Watt who broke off our engagement after Comorn was sold. I said everything I could, but Watt was so proud and so determined, and the loss of Comorn made him bitter.

He could only see it all in that one way. He wanted to be free. I suppose it did hurt me, a great deal more than Watt knew, or any one, more than I really knew myself. I reckon it almost broke my heart, but I tried not to show it. Then you remember Joe Macie began coming here. Mother encouraged him, and I encouraged him, too, because I was so lonely and because I thought it might make Watt jealous and bring him back again. But it didn't. And seeing Joe so often I got to liking him quite well, until the day on the boat when that negro girl, Hortense Brent, fascinated him and he scarcely spoke to me. That did hurt my pride. To have Watt break our engagement when there was really no reason for it, and then to have Joe Macie act as if he'd never seen me before just for a negro girl; it was hard to bear. I felt there couldn't be anything to me if I couldn't hold Watt, or even Joe Macie. Then Eugene came. Mama liked him at once, and was always inviting him to Avalon, because she knew how badly I felt about Watt and about Joe Macie, and she was so afraid somebody would get hold of him first. You know how mother always wanted me to have attention. She made father overcome his prejudice against Eugene. Oh, yes, indeed, father was quite prejudiced against him at first. And she asked me to be nice to Eugene, and scolded me because I was so distant. I didn't mean to be, only I didn't want to care for him and then find that he didn't care for me. But when I saw that Eugene really did care, or really seemed to care, I suppose I began to care too, a little at first, and then a little more, until I cared a very great deal, until I came to love him more than I loved Watt, more than I loved anybody in the world."

She paused, expecting some reply from Ada.

"I'm very glad you told me, Polly. It is a great happiness to love some one, isn't it, dear, with your whole heart? I'm so glad you told me, about Watt, and this about Mr. Raymond. Watt never told us anything, not even mother." She put her arms about the girl. "Watt will be glad as I am that you are happy, for I'm sure he loves you yet. Poor Watt! Poor Watt!"

"Oh, no, Watt doesn't love me, I'm sure he doesn't," Polly protested. "Once perhaps, a little, but not now. Tell him I hope some day he'll find a wife who will love him as much as I have grown to love Eugene."

"I'll tell him, Polly," Ada said.

An old turbaned negress entered with lights. Just as they were turning from the window Polly gave a little cry and pointed to the Washington coach approaching through the gloom and storm.

"There's your uncle's carriage now. Oh, Ada, won't you run down and see if Watt is with them, and if he is come back and let me know."

So Ada hurried away to find her mother and her aunt, and to whisper Polly's message to Watt. As she descended the stairs the murmur of many voices rose to meet her.

Fires were ablaze on the hearths, shades and curtains were drawn, lamps were lighted; all the house was opened save the dining-room and Judge Beckford's study back of the library.

In the library the older men were gathered, smoking, or sipping hot toddies, while the rest of the house was given over to the ladies, young and old, and to such young men as found it impossible to absent themselves from their fair enslavers, and to a host of children who, in the hearty fashion of the country, had not been left behind.

Ada hurried through the study to a side door, to which, being less exposed to the fury of the wind, the arriving carriages were directed by Murphy Bird, who, bundled to the very eyebrows, his boots tied up in gunny-sacking, flourished between the stables and the kitchen assisting with the horses and generally overseeing the outlying hospitalities of Avalon. Grandpa Bird and Salvadorie had arrived with Mrs. Bird and were ensconced in a warm corner of the kitchen, while Mrs. Bird herself assisted in overseeing the extra servants which the great occasion had brought into the house.

"Evening, ladies and gentlemen all. Evening all." Ada heard Mr. Bird's soft salutation, and her uncle's gruff voice making rejoinder: "Hello, is that you, Murphy Bird? Thun-

der, the next time I come to Miss Polly's wedding I hope she'll choose a better night."

"You-all light down an' go right on in an' I'll 'tend to the horses. You go on in, too, Colonel. You ain't to put yourself out none to-night. I know your feed; it ain't heavy, but it's steady. You go right on in an' take a taste of toddy. My, Miss Ada, what you doing out here like this? You go right on in an' take some toddy with your uncle or you'll catch your death a cold. It's real welcome to see the neighbors all out for Miss Polly's wedding, but I'd of had more heart into hit if she wasn't a-going to marry a stranger. I ain't no patience with strangers nohow."

As Murphy spoke, Mrs. Washington released herself from several comforters and an old buffalo robe in which Colonel Washington had wrapped her, and descending from the carriage, swept into the house. Divested of cloaks and shawls, Mrs. Washington revealed herself in a rich gown of purple satin ornamented with masses of rare lace, while on her arms and ample bosom were quaint old jewels, heirlooms like the gown and lace. Mrs. Beverley, who followed her sister, wore a trailing gown of black silk which had done service on great occasions for many years. A handsome woman always, she was now even more striking in appearance. She had grown frail and thin, her gray hair had turned white, there were dark circles beneath her haunted eyes, but her figure was erect and stately, and her head nobly poised.

"How fast Mrs. Beverley is breaking," old friends commented in sorrow.

Watt, who followed his mother into the house, looked tall and dark and very handsome. He was painfully eager that his presence should not occasion the comment which his absence would have invited.

"The roads ain't hardly fitten to travel over, is they, Colonel? I disremember that I ever see such a fall of snow afore. It's most froze the feet off onto me."

"You come inside to the fire yourself, Murphy," said Judge Beckford who had followed Ada to the door. "Here you,

Rance Williams," he called to a figure slouching toward the kitchen door, "take Colonel Washington's horses to the stables. There's half a dozen of you lazy rascals out there and you're letting Mr. Bird do all the work. Come inside with us, Murphy."

With some diffidence, the poor white followed Judge Beckford and Colonel Washington into the study. Watt had disappeared with Ada.

"You go right over to the fire with Colonel Washington and I'll get you both something to warm you up," the judge directed. There was a hospitable rattling of glasses. "Come along, Colonel," said the judge. "How'll you have yours, Murphy, straight?"

"Yes, sir, I'll take mine barefoot if there ain't no objections. It sets steadier; a slug of whisky barefoot lays closter to your vitals than what it will if there's rain water into hit."

"Now, Colonel, you'll join us?"

"No, sir," said the colonel. "It's against my principles. I never take a drink unless I'm alone or in company. That's my rule, gentlemen, and I try to live up to it." And the genial colonel laughed merrily at his threadbare old joke which had done duty in Northmoreland thirty years and more.

"I know all about that! Well, gentlemen, your health," said the judge, raising his own glass.

A pleasant gurgling followed; a gentle smacking of the lips ensued, a sigh of satisfaction concluded the ceremony. Colonel Washington placed his hand a little lower than his bosom and patted himself complacently.

"My," said Mr. Bird softly, "that certainly did taste real welcome. If I was to take an' lay another alongside it'd be like two old friends meeting into a strange place. Yes, sir, it would put the tears right into your eyes to hear 'em cry an' carry on. Liquor into moderation is the onliest friend a pore man has. I often set an' think if I had a keg of corn whisky into the cellar how much quicker the winter-time would pass."

"When I take a drink," said the colonel, the genial twinkle deepening in his eyes, "I always feel like another fellow, and the other fellow wants a drink first thing."

"A swig of liquor, if a body feels like he needs it, ain't a-going to hurt no one," Mr. Bird declared with settled conviction.

"Well," said the judge, "nothing beats a trial, I reckon, nothing beats a trial," and the glasses clinked, and the decanter gurgled. "Take another drink, Murphy, and then go on out to the kitchen and keep warm. Don't you go near the stable again till you've had your dinner. Let those lazy niggers do the work."

"No, Judge, I reckon I'd better go on back to the barn," Mr. Bird replied as he replaced his empty glass on the silver tray. "I'm afraid the niggers'll steal the corn out of the mangers, and tote it home if a body don't watch out. They is all got that independent a-reading about Doctor Brent into their papers, that there ain't no doing nothing with them. Salvadorie he met up with one of old Mably's little niggers day before yesterday an' he knowed the nigger teacher was sick, an' so he took an' said to the little nigger, 'My, ain't you all glad your teacher's sick an' you don't have to go to school?' 'No, I ain't glad,' the poor little nigger boy said, 'I want to get my eddication.' Ain't it awful when a nigger feels that way?" And Mr. Bird eyed Colonel Washington as though he expected that gentleman to disagree with him. "What a nigger needs is to be taught his place, and he don't learn that into no schoolhouse. No, sir, a eddication, as you might say, is the worstus thing a nigger can have; it's bad for him, an' that's why he wants it. If you're born bright you don't need it, an' if you're born dull it won't do you no manner of good nohow. So that," said Mr. Bird with unwonted emphasis upon the final word, his eyes swimming in a gentle mist, while a pale gleam of spirit flickered over his countenance and died behind the drooping ends of his mustache, "I say so that I ain't no manner of use for no nigger nohow. An' any feller that says I have ain't a-sayin' what's so. Betwixt

me and you, he ain't, let him take it or leave it, just as he's a mind to. Yes, sir," said Mr. Bird, "let him take it or leave it. I ain't a-caring which he does. Let him make up his mind hisself, an' if his womenfolks mixes up into hit, like I've knowed womenfolks to do, it's betwixt man and man when all's said. So that," concluded Mr. Bird, with a rising emphasis due to his slightly elevated condition, "I ain't no more to say to nobody nohow."

Laughing, Colonel Washington passed into the library and so on into the parlors; greeting every one with gusto and good-humored raillery, he soon became the genial spirit of the scene. He could not be confined to any quarter of the house, but roamed like a belated Santa Claus from room to room.

A pleasant excitement and bustle pervaded the parlors, while in the kitchen and its dependencies six negro women were busy about the great range which fairly reeked with savory odors of the approaching dinner. After the dinner the bride was to don her bridal gown and veil, and the bridesmaids were to put on their special finery so that the marriage which was to take place at exactly nine o'clock should have its own separate pageantry.

In the stables Judge Beckford's coachman, assisted by the judge's "hands" and helpers, was tossing hay into the mangers and measuring out oats and corn. The whole dusky place with its huge beams and stanchions was redolent of timothy. The gloom was astir with the movement of horses, restless as they waited with impatience for their feed, content as they settled to the enjoyment of their oats and corn.

And still the snow fell and fell.

Just as the darkness closed Eugene Raymond and Douglas Hamilton drove through the gate of Avalon and drew up at the stables. Eugene was in high spirits. Both young men were wrapped in greatcoats and muffled to the eyes.

"Hello in there," Eugene shouted, as the horses came to a standstill with their noses touching the stable door. "Hello in there! For God's sake," he added as the negroes hur-

riedly appeared, "get these horses in out of the weather as fast as you can. It's an awful night."

"'Deed if it ain't," said Murphy Bird, looming through the blizzard, with a lantern on his arm, from the general direction of the kitchen; "I don't care if I never live to see another like it."

"Wish you happiness, Mr. Eugene, sir," said one of the negroes.

"Wish you happiness, Mr. Eugene," the others chorused.

"Thank you, boys," Eugene answered. "I'll give you something to-morrow to drink my health in, and Miss Polly's, too. To-night you'll get tight enough on what the judge gives you. See that you don't feed those horses yet. Let them rest for half an hour first. Are you ready, Hamilton?"

"All ready. Have you got your package safe?"

"Yes, it's in my pocket. Come along, we'll run for the kitchen door."

They made a dash across the yard toward the lights seen vaguely through the closing night and falling snow.

Once safely in the warm kitchen the negro women brushed the snow from their coats, and they made their way into the rooms where the guests swarmed. Here Eugene found Mrs. Beckford and confided to her the parcel he had brought for Polly, and then hurried off with Douglas Hamilton to dress for dinner.

A gift for Polly was always an event of importance to her mother. Mrs. Beckford therefore made haste up-stairs and, tapping softly, opened the door of her daughter's room. Within there was only the warm glow of the fire, but a brighter light came through an open door where, before a tall mirror Polly and her bridesmaids were occupied preparatory to descending to the parlors to await the announcement of dinner.

A long veil and lovely bridal robes were spread upon Polly's bed; the wreath of orange blossoms lay on a pillow ready to be donned as soon as dinner should be over. As Mrs. Beckford passed, the thought flashed through her mind that it looked like a death-bed, in which a bride was laid in all her

white attire. She closed her eyes to shut the horrid thought away, and the next moment she was in the brightly lighted room with all the girls about her clamoring to see the gift Eugene had brought for Polly.

As Polly possessed herself of the precious parcel, practical Agnes offered the scissors to cut the cords, but Polly would have none of them, and kept all in suspense while she untied the stubborn knots. At last the parcel was opened, and an old-fashioned jewel case was revealed. Lifting the cover Polly and the eager group about her beheld a string of pearls reposing on a pale blue velvet cushion. The pearls were even and beautiful, though of no great size; attached to them was a pendant in the form of an anchor, done in rose diamonds set in silver. The rare grace of the workmanship had softened the device, twining the anchor with thread-like ropes of tiny brilliants, making a design of beauty and significance.

Upon a card was written in Raymond's bold clear hand, "This was my mother's. Wear it to-night for her sake and for mine. Eugene."

Polly was much moved, Mrs. Beckford delighted, the girls full of admiration for the lovely jewel. It was beautiful in itself, and it was evidently an heirloom.

"Oh, it is lovely, Polly," Agnes cried. "Put it on, Polly, dear, and wear it at dinner."

"No, Agnes, no," said Kittie Braxton. "Polly must not put it on till just before she goes down-stairs to be married. It will bring her luck. Oh, dear me, I certainly do wish I was engaged to some one. I think to be married is the loveliest thing in the world. Oh, girls, aren't you all just dying to be married, too?"

"How you do carry on, Kittie Braxton; no one would ever think your father was a minister. Would they, Mrs. Beckford?" Agnes teased.

"You be patient, Kittie; I saw Bushrod Washington making eyes at you in church last Sunday, and you're to walk with him to-night. Perhaps if you're good, you'll get him yet," said Polly.

"Judge Beckford, do you hear this? Doctor Carniel was called to attend Lorella, Rance's wife. She's had another fit. That's why they weren't here in time for dinner."

There was a little hush and then Watt saw that Miss Page had seated herself at the grand piano and was rehearsing, with fingers poised noiselessly in air above the keys, the opening bars of the wedding march. Major Blackburn was to flutter his handkerchief as a signal to Miss Page after Ada had given a like signal from the head of the stairs to indicate that all was in readiness.

Voices rose in expectant query, and were hushed to expectant silence. The hands of the tall clock in the hall were within a minute of the hour. Watt Beverley could endure it no longer. He slipped away into Judge Beckford's study. He crossed the room and put his hand on the knob of the door that led out to the porch, then paused. He could not run away. He must not, on Polly's account; for Polly's sake, if not for his own, let the hurt be what it would, he must stay and see it out.

Buoyed up by this resolution he was about to return to the hall when a sound of wheels caught his ear. The wheels were at the door. They stopped. It must be some belated guest he thought. Crossing the room, he threw the outer door wide open to warn these late arrivals to make haste. In the doorway stood John Brent. A negro had run up to lead the team to shelter.

"John Brent!" Watt exclaimed, pausing, surprised and irresolute, as he regarded the snow-covered figure in the doorway. "What on earth ever brought you here to-night? We thought you were up north."

"Watt, help me in. I'm stiff with cold. I can't walk yet. I've driven across from Fredericksburg."

"From Fredericksburg!" Watt cried, "Not in this weather; not over these roads!"

"Yes, I came straight through, but I changed horses four times or I never could have made it." He glanced about the room and lowered his voice to a hoarse whisper. "Close those

doors, I must speak to you before any one sees me." Then as Watt drew back he caught his arm roughly in his eagerness. "For God's sake tell me; they're not married yet? Am I in time?"

"No, they're not married yet," Watt answered, still suspicious and irresolute. "What's the matter? What's happened?"

As he spoke the first notes of the wedding march came from across the hall.

"What's that?" John asked, clutching at Watt's arm.

"It's the wedding march," Watt said, and turned away. "If you've anything to say, be quick. I'm going in."

"Stop it! Stop it! I tell you it can't go on," John whispered fiercely. He looked at Watt, then shook his head. "No, not to you. Who's here? Doctor Carniel. You send Doctor Carniel to me, and then go for Judge Beckford. Bring him here. Tell him something has happened. Tell him anything. Ask him to wait. They must wait. Send him here. You'd better keep away yourself."

But still Watt hesitated.

"For God's sake, go!" John cried, pushing him toward the door. "Go, or I must go myself. I want to spare her."

"Spare her!" gasped Watt, as white as death, and he was gone.

Doctor Carniel was in the hall and came at once, closing the door carefully after him.

"John," he said, speaking quietly that his voice might not be heard by those outside, "what is it? What's brought you back? What's brought you here to Avalon to-night?"

"Doctor, I've come for Polly's sake. That man, who calls himself Eugene Raymond, isn't a white man; he's the son of that nigger down at Comorn Hall."

"John, you are mad! It can't be possible. It is beyond belief—what proof?"

"Ask him. But first look here." As he spoke he drew a number of photographs from his pocket. "I've brought the proofs," he said, spreading the photographs in order upon

the judge's table. Then pointing with his finger: "Look, that's Eugene Raymond, isn't it? Well, that is Eugene Raymond Brent. His mother was Doctor Brent's first wife. There he is as a boy in a family group. That's J. C. Brent standing beside him, isn't it? And that's his sister Hortense standing beside them; you recognize her, don't you?"

"John, when did you find these photographs?"

"In Montreal four days ago, the day I started south."

"Hush, here's her father," warned the doctor.

Judge Beckford entered the study. He was visibly disturbed by the untimely arrival of an unwelcome guest.

"Why, John, what's brought you to Avalon in such a condition, and at such a time?" he asked with cold displeasure. "I don't say you're not welcome—but you must realize I have no time to give you now—"

As he spoke John crossed to the door which led to the hall. He paused there and turned to Doctor Carniel.

"You get him away, Doctor, while I explain things to the judge. Get him away. Let him have a start, or you know what will happen. Be quick."

He pushed the doctor from the room, locked the door and put the key in his pocket. Then crossing quickly, before the judge could guess his purpose, he locked the door leading to the library. Then he turned to Judge Beckford.

"This passes my patience," the judge said, his eyes flashing. "Open those doors immediately. My daughter is waiting for me."

"All right, Judge. All right, in just a moment, in just a moment."

As he spoke he leaned with his ear close to the heavy panel. He was listening to hear if some one left the house.

"Open that door instantly," commanded the judge, his anger rising.

"All right, Judge, all right," John Brent repeated, "in just a moment, in just a moment more."

"Have you gone mad?" cried the judge, approaching John

and laying his hand upon his shoulder. "This is outrageous and insulting. Have you gone mad, I say?"

John lifted his head and looked Judge Beckford in the face.

"I am not mad, Judge Beckford," he answered slowly, still listening while he spoke. "And I have not come to insult you but to be of service to you." He paused and bent his head again close to the panel. Some one was leaving the house. He heard Doctor Carniel's voice outside the door.

"All right, Doctor?" he called.

"All right in one moment, John," came the doctor's steady voice.

"I do not lack a sense of humor," said the judge, "but such a jest as this is unheard of at such a time. Open the door at once."

"Doctor Carniel isn't jesting, and neither am I," said John. "I'm ready now, but first will you listen to me quietly for just one moment? Then I'll apologize, anything you want; I only ask you to be patient for a moment more. Oh, Judge—I'm sorry—I'm mighty, mighty sorry—but I bring bad news. I've come to tell you something you won't want to hear, and I don't know how to tell it. I'm sorry, but this man who calls himself Eugene Raymond is an impostor."

"An impostor!" cried the judge. "Eugene Raymond an impostor?"

"Yes, he isn't a white man. He's the son of Julius Cæsar Brent, of Comorn Hall. I've told the doctor, and I can tell you now that he's gone."

"Eugene—Brent's son. That nigger's son," the judge gasped, leaning upon the table for support. "How dare you bring me such an abominable lie?"

In silence John pointed to the photographs spread out upon the table almost beneath the judge's hands.

"See for yourself," he said and turned away to unlock the door which led from the study into the library. As he did so there was a loud knocking on the hall door.

"Judge Beckford! Judge Beckford!" Mrs. Beckford called.

"Polly is waiting. What is the matter? Why don't you come? Why don't you come?" The knocking was repeated.

The judge looked up at John Brent, stunned and helpless.

"I don't understand," he muttered. "I don't understand." It was evident that a terrible dread had seized him. His anger against John had vanished.

"Hush," said John, looking toward the door. And spreading out his photographs under the lamp, he signed to Judge Beckford to look at them again.

"That's Raymond, as he is now. That's Raymond as a boy. That's Raymond and his father. That's the picture that caught my eye first in a photographer's window up there in Montreal. You see that's Doctor Brent and his first wife, Eugene's mother. There they are in a family group; Julius Caesar, his present wife, and Raymond and Hortense. There is no mistaking them. I found the first by chance and then I searched the others out."

"Good God!" cried the judge, sinking heavily into his chair by the table as he stared at the photographs. "Good God, it's true, it's true. That necklace, with the anchor, on the woman's throat. He gave it to Polly. She was just fastening it about her neck when they sent for me. Oh, Polly, my poor little Polly. Oh, God help her! God help her!"

John Brent opened the door which led to the library. He could see Doctor Carniel with Douglas Hamilton and Watt Beverley beside him. All were very white. Beyond them he saw a crowd of anxious faces.

"Has he gone?" John asked.

"Yes," the doctor's voice came back in brief assent.

"What's the matter?" Hamilton demanded. "Mrs. Beckford is frightened to death. Where's Raymond gone?"

"Called away on business," John answered steadily.

"What business?" Hamilton insisted.

"Don't ask," John said, pointing to the judge. "He knows. I've told him. He'll tell you when he's ready."

As John spoke, Mrs. Beckford forced her way into the room and ran to her husband.

"Come away," John said to Watt and Hamilton, who fell back, awed by the bowed head of the judge. Together they went into the hall and closed the door upon the stricken husband and wife.

Doctor Carniel followed them. He was sending his Matilda to quiet Polly.

"Just tell her Eugene's been called away. It will be all right in the morning. Don't let her come down-stairs. It can't do any good."

But his warning came too late.

Pale and alarmed, with her bridal veil trailing over her long satin gown, looking more slim and childlike than ever, with the pearls and the anchor pendant gleaming at her throat, Polly was making her way down the stairs, followed by her bridesmaids.

"What is it? Where's papa? Where's mama? Where's Gene? Where's Gene? Oh, something has happened, something dreadful. Where is Eugene?"

A wail, her mother's voice, came from the study, and a strong man's groan of agony.

"Gene! Gene!" the girl cried. "Gene!" the cry rose piercingly. "Oh, something dreadful has happened to Gene, and you're all afraid to tell me. But they will." She broke from Mrs. Carniel's arms and forced her way to the door of the study, opened it and ran in. "Papa! Papa, where is Gene? Is he dead? Is he dead?"

Those who followed saw the judge's arm close about her.

"Better he were. Better he were," he repeated over and over again.

"It's false. I don't believe it," cried Mrs. Beckford, her self-control all lost. "It's John Brent's mean revenge." She came to the door which opened on the hall. "Where is he? Where is John Brent? He says that Eugene Raymond is a negro, the son of that nigger, Julius Cæsar, down at Comorn Hall. He should be torn to pieces for a slanderer. My daughter deceived by a negro! It is false! It is false!"

"No." It was the judge's voice that answered her. "It is

the truth. John came to warn us. I thank great God he came in time."

A firm look came over the judge's face. He lifted his head.

"Where is the villain?" he demanded.

"He is gone," Doctor Carniel answered. "Let him go."

The men looked from one to another and set their lips and shook their heads, but they waited for the master of the house to speak.

"No, not this way," he said. "I reckon I've got something to say to him about this. Mother, you take care of her." As he spoke he passed Polly into Mrs. Beckford's arms. Then he turned to the men about the door. "Gentlemen, I reckon there's business before us to-night. He's got the start. But there are some here who will follow, or do I go alone?"

"Father." It was Polly who spoke. "Father, you won't kill Eugene, you won't kill him!"

"No, no, honey," he said tenderly. "No, no, honey." Then he left the room, followed by all the men, and went up-stairs to his bedroom to get his revolver while the others ran to the stables to saddle the fastest horses.

As the judge descended the stairs he covered his ears with his hands to shut out the pitiful moaning which came from the study and hurried out into the bitter night.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CONSEQUENCES

Doctor Carniel made no effort to join in or to stay the pursuit. His duties were with those within the walls of Avalon.

Many of the guests took such horses as were left in the stables and departed to their homes, while others remained to await the return of the pursuers or the coming of daylight before venturing out in the storm.

In a room above John Brent was seated before the fire recovering from the cold and fatigue of the long drive from Fredericksburg. He had spent nearly fourteen hours on the roads exposed to the full fury of the storm. Here Doctor Carniel came to him when he could leave Polly and Mrs. Beckford to the care of Mrs. Carniel and Ada.

The doctor hoped that John's discoveries might have penetrated the mystery surrounding the years of his mother's absence, but the young man shook his head. All his efforts had proved fruitless. He had questioned several persons who had known Doctor Brent from the time of his first appearance in Montreal, but they could not aid him. If his mother had ever been in the city she had left no clue by which he could trace her movements or learn anything of her history.

One day, some weeks after his chance meeting with Brent, his eye was attracted by a placard in a photographer's window announcing the sale of photographs of the famous negro lecturer, Doctor J. C. Brent. Entering the place, he asked to see the photographs. Then falling into conversation with the photographer, who regarded Doctor Brent as a celebrity of the first rank, John easily led him to talk of the mulatto and his family.

"That's Doctor Brent and his first wife," the photographer explained as he handed John a bit of pasteboard. "Odd-look-

ing and old-fashioned, aren't they? But he hasn't changed so much in twenty years. That was the first professional work I ever did for him. Here's his son, Eugene, when he was a baby. Here's his daughter, Hortense, as a little girl. Those two were the children of the French wife. That's the present Mrs. Brent, taken about the time of her marriage. And there they all are in a family group, very natural pose, don't you think so? That was taken when Celia was a baby. That's Eugene again, as a little lad. There's another of him as he looked when he came home from his first year at school abroad. There's Miss Hortense as a girl of eight, very pretty even then. There she is again. I took that just before she went south to join her father in Virginia. Beautiful, isn't she? That's the last one I took of Celia. And here's Eugene again, his last photograph, taken less than a year ago."

"Who do you say this is?" John asked, looking intently at the likeness of Eugene. "I'm certain I've seen him somewhere, but I can't remember where."

"That's Eugene Brent, Doctor Brent's son. Handsome fellow, isn't he?"

"Where is he now?" John asked. There was something strangely familiar in the face which aroused his curiosity.

"That I can't tell you," the photographer answered. "I don't know whether he's gone back to England or gone down to Virginia to help his father run his plantation. He came in here and sat for that negative the last time he was in Montreal. That was before his father had created such a stir."

Suddenly as he looked at the photograph John remembered when and where he had seen the face before; at night in the doorway at Comorn Hall, and in a flash he understood that Eugene Raymond and Eugene Brent were one. Realizing the importance of his discovery, for Doctor Carniel's letters had informed him of the date of Polly Beckford's marriage, he purchased the photographs and hurried from the place.

He knew that Judge Beckford must be warned at once. To telegraph would have been to spread the story broadcast, as all telegrams were repeated by telephone from Fredericks-

burg to their destinations in Northmoreland. He could write, but the time was perilously short, and he knew how frequently letters had been delayed or miscarried since the closing of the post-office at Weyanoke Cross Roads. The only safe course would be to return to Virginia taking his proofs with him. That night he left Montreal.

Storms had delayed his train. He was twenty-four hours late in reaching Baltimore. There he learned that the Potomac was frozen; no boats were running. A belated train enabled him to reach Fredericksburg at six o'clock on the morning of the day set for the wedding. From Fredericksburg he had attempted to telephone Doctor Carniel, but the wires had gone down in the blizzard. One chance only remained, to secure horses and drive across. And this he had done, fearing as the day passed and the night fell with miles still intervening between himself and Avalon that after all he might arrive too late.

The rest the doctor knew.

"Do you think he can get away in such a storm?" John asked after a silence as he stared into the fire.

"I don't see where he can go that he'll be safe," the doctor answered. "There's no escape by the rivers, and you know what the roads are between this and Fredericksburg. His best chance would be to get the niggers to hide him in their cabins until they could smuggle him out of the county. But I don't believe he'll ever think of it." The doctor paused. "John, don't you reckon he's made straight for Comorn Hall? Wouldn't that be the first place he'd think of?"

"They'll go to Comorn, of course."

"The judge will. Lucky for Julius Cæsar that he isn't there to-night. It's an awful business any way you look at it. An awful, awful business." He rose and paced the room. "This is the second house to feel the blight of that man's coming. His shadow fell on Brentwood first and killed your mother, and now it falls on Avalon. Where will it fall next, I wonder?"

As he spoke, Mr. Braxton entered the room, and in hushed

voices Doctor Carniel and John repeated to him the story of the discovery of Eugene Raymond's identity.

"What did Raymond say when you told him you knew who he was?" Mr. Braxton asked the doctor. "How did you tell him?"

"I don't know. I just called him aside and told him he'd better put a saddle on his horse and get away from Avalon as fast as he could if he valued his life. He turned deadly pale, and just said, 'Come, Doctor, you're joking?' Then I told him it was known that he was Doctor Brent's son, and that there would be no wedding here to-night. For a moment he hesitated as if he would like to fight it out, but just then he heard the judge's voice. I could see he couldn't face him.

"Tell Polly I'm very sorry for what's happened," he said as easy and civil as you please. 'I'll write. Thank you for giving me fair warning.' Then he ran to get his overcoat. That's all I saw of him."

"There's no doubt in the world he was sent on to play this part. I've seen him on the wharf myself standing not ten feet from his father, and neither making the least sign that they knew each other. It's been a plot from first to last to get revenge and, nigger-like, they chose the weakest victim. Poor little Polly!" His voice became husky, he ceased to speak and taking Doctor Carniel by the arm they left the room together.

John, utterly exhausted, nodded before the fire. Suddenly he was aroused by some one moving in the room. He started up, and as he did so saw that it was Ada Beverley.

"Ada," he said, "Doctor Carniel and Mr. Braxton were here a minute ago. I must have fallen asleep when they went out." He rose and stood before the fire. "What about Polly?"

"She's sleeping now—the doctor gave her something to make her sleep. I don't know, John," she hesitated to give her fears even the shape of words. "I don't know," she repeated, and was silent.

Almost insensibly their love drew them together until they stood side by side and hand in hand in the dim room.

"You learned nothing while you were gone that can help you? Nothing about your mother or your father, John? Only this terrible thing about Mr. Raymond?"

"Only about Raymond. Nothing else," he answered.

"You've not lost hope, John. You are not discouraged?" she asked eagerly. So much was at stake; his name, his future, their happiness.

"I haven't lost hope. As long as Julius Cæsar lives there is one man who knows all that I need to know. Somehow I'll get the truth from him yet before he dies. And when I do it will all be as simple as finding out about Raymond from the photographs."

"He will never forgive you for what you have done to-night—and if they overtake his son—" She shuddered.

"I'm not counting on his forgiveness," John answered with grim humor. "If he doesn't like what's happened he's only himself to blame for it. I came back to-night for Polly's sake, not to get even with him, but if I'd tried to hurt him I don't think I could have hurt him more. And I'm not sorry for that either. Think of a man going up and down the country preaching equality, and bringing such a thing as this on decent people. If it wasn't that he's the only one who can help me to clear my name I believe I'd have shot him months ago. Poor Ada," he added tenderly, "what a thing for a girl like you to be mixed up in; caring for a fellow who is at the mercy of a nigger rascal like that man. Branded as I've been branded. If I didn't love you so much, Ada, I sometimes think I'd give it all up, and start in new somewhere under another name. Sometimes I'm afraid I'll never win out here with this brand upon me. It's so long to wait for you, Ada; it's so hard to wait for the thing I want more than anything else in the world."

She placed her hands on his breast and lifted her lips to his.

"John," she said, "I would go with you to-morrow. I don't ask you to wait. There is only one thing which keeps me here now. Mother. She is terribly changed, John. Sometimes I think her mind will be affected like your mother's. We none

of us understand it. Even before you, John, I must think of her. If only she could go with us I would be glad if you would take me to-morrow. I know, I know," she said, checking his protests, "but there may be happier times. But none when we shall ever need each other more than we do now."

"Not till my name is cleared, Ada, never till then."

The lights burned on in every room at Avalon; the frightened women huddled in the great parlors over the dying fires, or stole up and down the stairs to ask for news of Polly and her mother. The flowers and evergreens with which the house was decorated still kept their places, and the long bands of satin ribbon still marked the path the bridal party was to have taken through the rooms.

In the kitchen the negro women spoke in whispers.

"Him a nigger, Julius's son. Lord save us, did you ever hear the beat of that. I don't believe my own senses. My, an' he fooled 'em all till John Brent came along."

In the stables the negroes were discussing the chances of the pursuit.

"They'll get him sure," Rance Williams said. "He don't know this country like the others does. They'll get him sure, an' when they does they'll fill him full of bullets like he was a dog that'd been out after sheep."

"I reckon maybe they'll bring him back an' lynch him right before the house. They does that-a-way sometimes just to show us colored folks. It's awful the way white folks treats niggers, ain't it? I certainly does think Miss Polly thought a heap of him. An' I never seen a sightlier young man than what he was, an' John Brent come all the way back from Canada just to tell. Do you reckon he'd 'a' done that if he'd really been Mr. Eugene's half-brother like some folks says he is. Lord God Almighty, we niggers is just got to get up an' dust an' do something or the white folks'll trample us into the dirt so deep we'll never get out. I wonder what Doctor Brent's a-going to do about this? If I'd of knowed what was the matter, I could of told him of a place to went. He ain't no chance riding the road a night like this with all

them white devils hot-foot after him. I certainly does hope he'll get away, 'deed I does."

"I couldn't think what could be the matter," said another, "when he come a-running out here and asked me to saddle up his horse as quick as I could. He'd forgot something he needed, he said, and kep' a-telling me to hurry. 'You-all done better send some one,' I said to him, 'this ain't no night for you to be out on horseback.' 'I got to go myself,' he said; 'it's a joke on Miss Polly,' he said, an' that's all he said, 'cept he kep' on a-hurrying me an' hurrying me an' a-listening as if he expected to hear them a-coming after him from the mansion."

"I reckon that's what he done gone an' expected sure 'nough," said the first speaker, "an' now he's a-racing an' a-riding for his life like he had been a murderer or a wild beast, an' all them white men after him that two hours ago was a-crowding round an' shaking his hand an' calling him Gene here and Gene there; an' all this change have done come about just because he has a drop of colored blood in his body. It don't help him none that his ma was white, an' that his pa is more'n half white, an' a bigger man than any white man in Virginia. No, sir, just that one little drop of nigger blood an' he hasn't got no rights on earth that a white man's bound to respect. Ain't that so, brother?"

"'Deed it's the gospel truth, brother. 'Deed it is. Seems to me it ain't right neither. This ain't what old John Brown died for, no, sir, nor Abe Lincoln neither. If Mr. Eugene ain't good enough for them I don't see no hope of equality nohow, 'deed I don't."

"If I was to see Mr. Gene go by now, an' a white man came along by looking for him I'd say he went the other way."

"I'd say you go look for him in hell, that's what I'd say. An' if he said anything to me I'd bust the white man's head open with an ax an' I'd throw him in the hog-pen, that's what I'd do."

"What do you reckon they'd 'a' done if John Brent hadn't got here till to-morrow morning? What 'ud they done then,

do you reckon? It's scandalous the way the white men carry on, walking roughshod over us. But it ain't always a-going to be like this. There's a good time a-coming, brother, an' it's a-coming quick."

"It can't be none too soon. I want to see the day when a colored gentleman can marry a white woman if he wants to. I don't see why Mr. Gene couldn't do as his father done. His mother was a white woman. Why shouldn't his wife be white—or yours, or mine, or any colored gentleman's?"

They lowered their voices to a whisper.

Beyond the gates of Avalon Eugene forced his horse into a gallop. He was in the saddle some minutes before he realized what had happened. At first he did not grasp his peril, or but dimly. He knew that John Brent had returned from Canada, and that by some means his own identity had been discovered. Whether he had heard of John's return in the house, or from the men in the stables, he did not know, only he knew that he had come and that the game was up at Avalon.

He had a dull remembrance that Doctor Carniel had seemed very eager that he should leave the house at once, and that he himself after a moment's hesitation was glad to slip quietly away; for his own part he always dreaded scenes and recriminations and explanations. And then it flashed upon him suddenly that of all those people gathered to celebrate his marriage, friends and well-wishers but a moment since, not one regarded him now as a white man, not one would have listened to a word of explanation or defense. He was a negro in the eyes of every white man at Avalon. If he fell into their hands that night he would share the fate of the others of his race who had offended unpardonably.

Instinctively he turned his horse's head toward his father's house. He had not gone a hundred yards before he realized that he had chosen the most dangerous road which he could take. If there was pursuit, as his dawning apprehension told him there would be, the first thought of his pursuers would be Comorn Hall. He hesitated, but it was too late to turn

back and pass Avalon. He dared not trust himself on any of the wood tracks which led down to the frozen bays on either hand. He could only push on, trusting that the fast-falling snow and the speed of his horse might enable him to gain Comorn before he could be overtaken. The drifts were very heavy. His hope was that they would delay his pursuers as they delayed him. He looked over his shoulder back along the way which he had come. He could see nothing. Once he drew his horse almost to a walk, and listened. He could hear nothing but the wind moaning through the pines. Then in a lull, he was certain he heard distant shouts, but the sweep of the wind in the pine woods silenced them. Again he heard a shout. This time he was certain, though the sounds came from far in the distance. The faint cry chilled his heart as the cold had chilled his body. He urged his horse forward. It would be an awful thing to be shot from behind; more hideous a thousand times to be taken alive, bound and led back to Avalon, there to be strung up to a tree and riddled with bullets as a warning to all his race. And if those men came up with him one thing or the other would happen. He was unarmed. He had not even a revolver with which to hold them at bay, or which he might turn upon himself in extremity.

And all this terror, this mortal dread, this sickening fear, all this hideous unreality, this nightmare of cold and shame and terror, all this because a drop of negro blood was flowing somewhere in his veins.

Now when the wind sank he could hear the shouts of his pursuers above the muffled beatings of his horse's hoofs. If he could hold his lead till he reached Comorn there would be time to enter the house, to arm himself, perhaps by some miracle to cheat them and escape. He knew that fall as the snow would, and drift it as the wind would, yet his path must be plain and fresh to those who followed. An hour's start and the wind and the snow would have been his allies concealing and obliterating all signs of his passing, but now they were enemies that only blinded him and kept him back.

He was approaching Comorn now; his horse swept down the

level road through the little stretch of woodland, on, by Comorn Gate, on and on, and suddenly as he peered through the darkness the lights of Comorn Hall gleamed out across the snowy wind-swept fields.

As he saw the welcome lights the shouts of his pursuers sounded from the distance. They were gaining on him at last.

"Honey," said Old Henrietta to Hortense as they sat with Mamie Ann Dandridge before the blazing logs in the library at Comorn Hall, "honey, I reckon the business at Avalon's all over by this time and Mr. Eugene Raymond's married to Judge Beckford's daughter. I certainly wishes that young man happiness," she added with a sly glance at her granddaughter. "I think I'll mix a little toddy to drink the health of the bridegroom and his bride." As she spoke she rose and moved toward the door.

"Mr. Eugene Raymond must be a great favorite of yours, Mrs. Brent," Mamie Ann said as she looked up from her sewing. "You don't often—"

Old Henrietta lifted her hand warningly.

"Hush, what's that?" she asked. "Didn't you-all hear something?"

"It's just the wind, grandmother," Hortense said.

"No," the old woman answered, still listening intently. "Hush," she said again; "hush, child. It doan' seem like it was the wind."

Hortense took the tongs from the hearth and began to adjust the logs. The negress bent forward and laid her hand upon her arm. The fire crackled and flamed up.

"I tell you hush. I tell you hush," she repeated in a tone of authority. Again she listened intently. "Now, there, doan' you hear it? Hark, again."

Away in the night they heard a sound, a cry borne faintly on the wind, and nearer the quick beat of hoofs.

"Yes, I hear something now," and Mamie Ann rose as she spoke. "Hortense, you hear it now?"

Hortense had started to her feet. Old Henrietta was peering from the window into the black night beyond.

"Some one's riding over the frozen road to Comorn House. Doan' yo' hear the horse a-galloping?" She paused and listened. "It ain't a night to be abroad for nothing. It's bad luck comes riding through the snow, bad luck comes galloping."

"What can it mean? Who can it be? I hope nothing has happened at Avalon," Hortense said from her place beside her grandmother at the window.

As she spoke a shout came from without, a voice clamoring for admission.

"Hortense! Hortense! Open! Open! In God's name, open the door!" And a loud knocking echoed through the house.

"Eugene!" With a cry Hortense rushed to the outer door, drew back the bolts and flung it wide.

Eugene staggered in.

"Eugene, Eugene, what's happened, what's brought you here?" she asked.

"Eugene Raymond," cried Mamie Ann, amazed by the spectacle of Hortense clinging to the stranger.

"No, no. Eugene Brent. He's my brother," cried Hortense. "Eugene. Eugene, what's happened?"

"Quick, close the door, bolt it," he cried. "Now get me a revolver. I saw one in the governor's desk the last time I was here. Quick! Quick! They'll be here in a moment. I swear to God they shan't lynch me."

"Lynch you," cried Mrs. Dandridge. "Lynch you."

"That's what they'll do if they ever get their hands on me," he answered. "They've learned whose son I am. They gave me a start. Where's the revolver? Hortense, for God's sake, find it, find it. I tell you they'll be here in another minute, and it's certain death if they get me. By God, they'll never take me alive."

His sister found the heavy revolver.

"Here, Gene," she said, calm and collected now. "Take it. It's loaded. Here are more cartridges."

"I've locked the big door," Old Henrietta said as she re-entered the room; her eyes were kindling, and she stood erect.

From the distance came the shouts of the pursuers.

"Grandmother," Hortense cried eagerly, "if he could only get to Burnt Quarter Joe Macie would help him for my sake, I know he would."

"Burnt Quarter," Eugene repeated. "But that's across the cove."

"Come, we'll beat them yet," Old Henrietta cried exultantly. "God ain't bridged the river and the cove for nothing. Come, Old Mammy Hetty'll guide you across to Burnt Quarter on God's bridge. Come, honey," and she caught Eugene by the arm and drew him toward the door, "we ain't no time to lose." She paused and turned to Hortense. "Keep them searching the house till the snow covers our tracks if you can. They'll never think of Burnt Quarter. Doan' yo' fear, child; doan' yo' fear."

"Oh, hurry, hurry," warned the girl, "I'll keep them as long as I can. Hurry, grandmother, hurry," she begged the old woman who again paused at the window.

"If I could spit on them, if I could trample them," Old Hetty muttered. "I'll burn their barns, I'll lay their houses in the dust for this night's work. I'll learn them yet who Hetty is." She turned from the window. "Come," she said.

"Eugene," it was Hortense who delayed him. "Is she your wife?"

"No," he replied as he followed his grandmother toward the door which led into the corridor. "They learned first."

"Who told them?"

"John Brent. That's all I know."

"John Brent."

As Hortense echoed the name Eugene and Old Henrietta passed from the room, descended a narrow staircase to the lower floor and slipped from the house.

"Come," Hortense said, "let's put the lights out and go upstairs. It will take a little time to light the lamps again, and every instant may help my brother."

A moment more and Comorn Hall was in darkness save for

the glow of the firelight in the library. Then, remembering, Hortense made her way to the basement and bolted the outer door. This done she hurried back to the great hall and, with Mamie Ann, passed to the rooms above.

It seemed an instant only until a loud knocking resounded through the house, and Judge Beckford's voice was heard demanding admission.

Hortense hesitated, then fearing those without might attempt to gain an entrance on the river front, and so come upon her brother's footprints in the snow, she called to them from above, and taking a lighted candle, descended the stairs.

At the door she paused again to ask who knocked and what errand brought them at such an hour.

"If you don't know what's brought us already, you'll know soon enough," a man's voice answered.

"Gently, gently," she heard Judge Beckford say. "This is a woman."

Fearing to delay too long, she opened the door and admitted a party of resolute men led by Judge Beckford. Only the candle which she held and the light from the fire on the hearth in the library, shining through the open door, broke the shadows of the great hall and fell upon the group before her. Behind the judge she saw Watt Beverley and Bushrod Washington and Murphy Bird, these she knew by sight; others there were whom she had never seen before.

"We have come for Eugene Brent," Judge Beckford said.

"He is not here," Hortense answered steadily. "I am alone in the house with Mrs. Dandridge and my sister Celia."

"Get lights and search the place," the judge directed, turning to those who had come with him. "Don't disturb anything, but find him if he's here."

"Have the gentlemen a warrant to search Comorn?"

It was Mamie Ann Dandridge who spoke from the gallery where she had paused. Her voice was cool and insulting. "There is some law, I suppose, even in Virginia by which a person can protect his home."

"There seems to be none," the judge answered bitterly. "If the owner of this house had respected my home we would not be here to-night."

Without more ado lamps were relighted. It was a strange sight, these men in evening dress, with snow still clinging to their hats and coats, passing from room to room in the old house which all of them had known so well.

Watt Beverley led the search. He knew every hiding-place in attic and cellar. Nothing in the attic, only the vast ribbing of the roof, and the accumulation of trunks and household debris. Nothing in the bedrooms, but as they traversed these a strange sound came up to them. Hortense, in the drawing-room beneath, was playing northern war-songs and negro melodies. The insult was bizarre and glaring.

Their errand took them through the room where she sat, but they made no protest.

Convinced that the man they sought was not in Comorn Hall they passed again into the night and storm. At the stables they found Eugene's horse still saddled and bridled whinnying for admission. It was evident that it had been quartered there before.

Entering the stables they found lanterns and made a hurried search in the great hay lofts and in the carriage house where Brent's victoria stood swathed in its linen covers. But nowhere could they find a trace of the fugitive.

There were halloos from the distance and another party of pursuers rode up. All sorts of rumors were reported. After a brief consultation the horsemen remounted and scattered to their work; Murphy Bird with Jake Yutsy and others to search the negro cabins of the Neck, while still others were to patrol the roads till morning.

There was a lull in the wind, and the notes of Hortense's piano drifted out upon the night. Watt Beverley, now riding in advance with Judge Beckford, thought of the girl at Avalon and ground his teeth.

"Are you all right, Judge?" he asked, drawing his horse

nearer to Judge Beckford's. "It certainly is cold enough to-night. My hands feel frozen."

"You go back to Avalon, Watt," the judge made answer. "I don't feel the cold."

"I wish you'd go back, Judge," the younger man replied.

"I wish I could, Watt, but I haven't the courage to go home. I don't know how I could face Polly. I don't know anything to do for her. You know how her mother and I have loved her, and have tried to shelter her and make her happy. And yet we couldn't protect her from this awful blow. Who would have thought that nigger at Comorn Hall could strike at the life of my daughter? I'd have laughed at any man who said such a thing was possible. And yet, out of all of us, he chose her for his victim. He's struck at us through her, and I know he's wounded her to death. She'll never lift her head or smile again, never. She was the tenderest, gentlest girl. My God, if he hated us so why didn't he shoot me instead? That would have been merciful to this. My poor Polly, my poor little Polly!"

There was silence. Then Watt spoke again.

"Judge, don't mind what I say if it's wrong for me to say it now, but you know how much I always loved Polly. You know why I had to give her up—because I couldn't ask her to marry a homeless beggar. I couldn't then. But I've never stopped loving her, never for a day or for a single hour. She did care for me once; don't you think she might come to care for me again? Wouldn't it help her if she knew I loved her? Wouldn't it make it easier for her—this shame—if she knew that I wanted her to marry me," he breathed deeply, "now—to-morrow—to-night—would it help her?"

"Oh, God bless you, Watt." The judge leaned from his saddle and rested a hand that trembled on the young man's shoulder. "It would help her more than anything else in the world."

"Then we'll go back to Avalon and tell her," Watt replied. "We'll be married to-night, and to-morrow I'll take her away

somewhere until she forgets about this miserable business, and I'll bring her back in a month's time the happy girl she used to be."

"She'll never consent to it, Watt, she'll never consent. She'll count herself disgraced all her life, and she'd never let disgrace come to your name through any act of hers. And she will be right. It's the only hope for her, but neither she nor I could ask you to do it."

"You don't ask me, Judge, I ask you. I ask Polly. I want to save her, to help her. I love her. Isn't it natural that I want her to be my wife? If this hadn't happened she'd have been lost to me, out of my reach always, but now I can help her. She needs me, and now no man on earth can ever say I married her for any reason but because I loved her. What do you say, Judge? You've got to be with me in this. You've got to help me to win her to it, and so must her mother. You will, you will, Judge, won't you? Don't doubt for one moment that I'm asking for my own happiness as well as hers. Won't you help me to win Polly back?"

"God bless you, Watt," said the judge, taking the hand the young man held out to him in the darkness. "I never knew you before to-night. You have your father's heart, and I'd be proud to give you my daughter if I were a king." His voice broke. "I'll help you," he added, "and so will her mother, gratefully, gladly."

"Come, then, let's gallop," the young man cried. "We can't get to Avalon quickly enough to suit me."

They urged their horses forward through the storm. Watt saw that the judge's head was no longer sunk upon his breast. He held it erect. Hope had returned. He felt himself invincible. He would save her, and in time her love would flow back into the old channels, and he would have his reward. He knew her so well, he loved her so tenderly, he knew even the little sophistries to urge, the truths to speak, the truths to leave unspoken. If he were but there beside her, left alone with her, he would win her consent to his plan. Mr. Braxton must still be at Avalon. Once she yielded to his entreaties, they

would be married on the instant, lest she repent and recall her promise.

All the bitterness and resentment against fate faded out of his heart, and when he dashed in at the gates of Avalon it was the same sweet-natured jovial boy who had ridden through them so many, many times to vex and laugh and quarrel with his boyhood sweetheart, his young manhood's love. It was the old Watt Beverley, invincible and charming, but with a depth of heart and purpose the old Watt Beverley had never known.

Hearing their approach the negroes ran out to take the horses and to ask for news.

Watt tossed his bridle to the foremost and without stopping to answer his eager questioners, passed into the house. Ada met him in the dim hall, her eyes swollen and red from weeping. He put his arm about her. The girl only clung to him, sobbing, her face against his shoulder.

"It's all right, Ada," he said, patting her fondly, "don't cry. The judge and I have found a way out of it. I'm going to coax Polly to marry me, and you must help to win her over. It's the only way to make her forget. All this would never have happened if I'd not broken off the engagement. It's been a fearful blow, but I'm sure she'll be happy with me yet."

"Oh, Watt, Watt," sobbed his sister, "oh, my poor, poor Watt. I can't tell you. Hush! don't raise your voice; don't go up-stairs, you can't see her—Polly—"

"She's dead," he gasped. "Ada, she's dead."

"Hush, hush, remember her mother, remember her father, for their sakes."

"Polly's dead. Then she's killed herself. I'm too late! Oh, my God, my God! She's dead, and I'm too late, I'm too late!"

He covered his face with his hands, overwhelmed, broken-hearted, defeated.

From above came the low wail of the mother mourning her only child.

Through an open door Ada heard the judge questioning Doctor Carniel and Mr. Braxton, who had met him and led him into the study. His voice, quite calm and passionless, was strangely different from the voice she knew. It seemed made up of the many broken fragments of a human heart.

It was all pitifully simple. Mrs. Beckford had left Polly a moment to learn if the judge had returned, as Polly had asked for him when she roused from the uneasy sleep Doctor Carniel's opiates had induced. Mrs. Beckford had been absent from the room only a moment when a report rang violently through the house. They rushed to Polly's room, but Polly was not there. They found her lying dead before the bureau in her mother's room. She had taken a revolver from a drawer and had turned it against her breast. They had placed her where she now lay on her bed in her own room.

Watt crept up the stairs to the dimly lighted room and knelt by the bed, taking one of the cold little hands to hold in his.

There the judge and Ada found him an hour later, when the father outwardly calm, dared at last to look on the utter ruin of all he had loved and lived for. He put his hand on Watt's shoulder and steadied himself as he leaned over the bed to kiss the cold lips of his daughter. Then he said very gently:

"Come, Watt, come. We must think she is sleeping. We must not disturb her. She has found her own way out of it all, and we who loved her must bow our heads in consent."

Watt rose and left the room with the judge. Ada went to the window and noiselessly drew back the shutters. The snow was still falling, the gray dawn was creeping over the land, which seemed covered with a vast white pall.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE NEWS FROM AVALON

The dawn was breaking when Hortense heard a voice calling softly beneath her window.

"Honey, honey, does yo' hear me? It's Old Mammy Hetty. Come down an' open the do'. I'se 'most froze to death, I is."

In a moment Hortense had descended the stairs.

"Is he safe?" she asked in a breathless whisper. "Is Gene safe?"

"Doan' yo' worry about him, chile," her grandmother reassured her. "He's in a sleigh with Joe Macie traveling a road they ain't watching. We crossed over on the ice to Burnt Quarter, an' Mr. Joe he said he'd guarantee to get yo' brother safe through to Fredericksburg before a soul knew it. He said there wasn't nothing he wouldn't do to oblige you, honey, an' for me to tell you so. Yo' brother's on a train of cars by this time a-going north to jine his pa. There won't be no white man put a bullet in his back, nor a rope around his neck this day, thank God. Get me some whisky, honey, an' let me set by the fire an' get the frost out of my feet. It was cold a-goin', an' it was cold a-comin' back, but I reckoned you wouldn't have no peace of mind till you knowed that he was safe. Where's the whisky, chile? I sure done froze my feet."

All night long the riders scoured the roads and searched the cabins of the Neck. Toward dawn they began to come in, weary, hungry and half frozen.

Murphy Bird was the last man to straggle in.

"We ain't done what was right," he said softly, as he sat beside the kitchen fire at Avalon. "No, sir, we ain't done what was right by the judge to let that young nigger gentleman get by the way he done. But if it was me that was a-doing

it I'd take an' pour a two-gallon can of kerosene over his pap the first time he put his foot onto Beverley's Neck, an' when I had him soaked real well I'd take an' touch a match to him. I reckon he'd make a pretty blaze. Yes, sir, I'd learn him to meddle up with white folks an' bring death an' destruction where they wasn't due. He's just as answerable for pore Miss Constance's death as he is for pore Miss Polly's. I reckon the Lord'll catch up with him afore he goes far. Yes, sir, I reckon there's a hot place in hell that's ready for him now. A body's religion is a grand thing, yes, sir, it's a grand thing, but I ain't one of them that believes in leaving everything into the Lord's hands. No, sir, He's got His own good works to worry with an' study over, an' so He just takes an' leaves some little odd jobs to be put through by them that labors into the vineyard right down here. I'd of been a willing laborer if I had of come up with Mr. Eugene last night. Pore Miss Polly, pore, pore, pore little Miss Polly," and Mr. Bird stealthily touched his coat sleeve to his eyes.

The morning following Doctor Brent's lecture at Carnegie Hall found Mrs. Brent, with Bamford and Adriance, in the parlor of the great man's suite excitedly turning the pages of the newspapers, and opening the telegrams of congratulation which were already beginning to arrive, while Brent himself was shaving in his bedroom preparatory to a day already crowded with engagements and requests for interviews.

Brent's reception in New York had far surpassed even his own high expectations. His address had been received with every mark of enthusiastic approval. His slight lameness, apparent to all as he rose and moved forward to his place beside the speaker's table, recalled his courage and his service; and a feeling of almost personal adulation could be felt in every quarter of the great auditorium.

And now the morning papers were echoing the triumph of the night before. His address was quoted in full, and extended comment appeared on almost every editorial page. He had not only impressed, he had startled the city.

At each fresh outburst of delight; at each "Look here, Gen-

eral, just listen to this, will you," at each "Good lord, this is the best thing yet," the great man would enter the room, the lather smearing his swarthy face, his thick hair, crisp and damp, pushed back from his massive forehead, beaming with satisfaction, listen to a paragraph or, taking the proffered paper, glance at an editorial and then hurry away to continue his interrupted toilet.

At last he brought his shaving brush and mug and razor and, establishing a base before the mirror which adorned the mantel shelf, proceeded with his task while the notices were read aloud to him.

"That idea of not only educating the children so they can comply with the voting laws of the South, but for the grown and middle-aged men to educate themselves as well, so that in this generation we can restore the ballot to the negro, seems to have hit them pretty hard. It flashed into my head last night after I'd begun to speak. There's something in it, I can see that by the way they take it up."

His voice was resonant and self-assertive, his mood buoyant.

"What does the *Sun* say about my financial policy? Let me hear that again, will you, Bamford? That reads like a mighty good notice to me. How does that strike you, Brother Adriance? We mustn't forget to send a set of these notices to Bishop Comfort. Molly, you'll remind me of it, won't you? I am hurrying. No, I haven't cut myself yet, but I reckon I will if I don't stop talking. Will you answer that telephone, please, Brother Adriance? Reporters down-stairs? Yes, tell them I know they are waiting, and that I'll see them as soon as I've finished shaving. No, no, it's no use coming up to the room till I can talk to them. What's that? A young man from Virginia to see me? There are a good many young men in Virginia, which one is this? Started up in the elevator already? Don't they know I left particular instructions not to send strangers up to these rooms. A relative? Nonsense! That's a new dodge."

As Adriance hung up the receiver a knock sounded on the door.

"Bamford, won't you see who it is?" the great man asked. "Just say it's out of the question for me to talk to anybody for half an hour."

Thus instructed, Bamford opened the door leading to the corridor.

"No, no," he said. "You can't possibly come in. For heaven's sake let Doctor Brent have a chance to dress. Send up your name in half an hour, he will be ready to see reporters by that time."

"I'm not a reporter," a familiar voice replied. "Let me in. I'm Doctor Brent's son!"

"Eugene!" cried Mrs. Brent.

"Gene!" echoed her husband, who had paused to listen midway to the bedroom door.

Hearing his father's voice, Eugene brushed Bamford aside and entered.

"I thought you were in Europe!" Mrs. Brent exclaimed, all her old suspicions waking as she regarded the young man's haggard face.

"Gene, what's brought you here? Tell me what's happened in Virginia?" Brent's tone betrayed his great anxiety.

"In Virginia," Mrs. Brent repeated, her fears confirmed. "Then he went back to Avalon in spite of everything. Oh, Julius, Julius, were you both deceiving me?"

Bamford and Adriance looked on in amazement. Brent turned to them.

"This is my son, Eugene," he said. "He's just come up from Virginia, maybe with bad news. Will you gentlemen be kind enough to step into the next room while I talk to him for a moment? It's a private matter that's brought him," he added in lieu of any further explanation. When Bamford and Adriance had gone he turned once more to Eugene. "Tell me what's happened? For God's sake, Gene, don't keep me in suspense!"

"Then the news hasn't got through yet?" Eugene asked.

"What news?"

"Why, I'm not exactly on my wedding journey, Governor,"

the young man replied, trying to speak lightly. "It's all off. At the very last minute the judge found out that I'm your son." He tried to smile, but the old gay spirit could not be summoned.

"Thank God they learned in time," Mrs. Brent said fervently.

"What happened then?" Brent asked, disregarding his wife's interruption.

"Then? Why, I got away from the house as fast as I could, and just in time, too." He lowered his voice as he continued. "I had to ride for my life. I beat them to Comorn. At Comorn we could hear them shouting in the distance, and it looked about all up when Hortense thought of Joe Macie, and your mother piloted me across the cove to Burnt Quarter and Macie got me to Fredericksburg. From there I came straight on. I thought you ought to know. The minute the wires are up they'll telegraph this thing all over the country." He paused. "It's a pretty bad business, Governor, any way you look at it."

Brent paced the floor.

"This will ruin my lectures here," he said, "unless we can get our side of the case into the papers first. I'd better put Bamford on the job at once." He crossed to the door of the room in which Bamford and Adriance were waiting, then hesitated and turned back. "No, we'd better go slow. Perhaps they'll hush it up down there; perhaps it won't get out at all. Who was it warned them? Has Hortense been careless—or my wife?" and he turned an angry glance toward Mrs. Brent.

"No, no. Hortense had nothing to do with it. Mother had nothing to do with it," Eugene hastened to say. "It was John Brent. Doctor Carniel said he'd come back from Canada to warn them."

"John Brent!" cried his father. "How could John Brent know?"

"I suppose he picked it up in Montreal somehow. He might have found it out in fifty ways."

"John Brent!" the older man repeated, as though he could not credit it. "John Brent!"

There was silence for a moment and then Mrs. Brent asked:

"What became of the girl?"

The question startled Eugene.

"I don't know," he answered. "I didn't have much time to think of her. The whole thing happened so quickly."

"Why bother about her now?" Brent interposed. "She'll survive it, of course."

"Will she?" Mrs. Brent asked, turning upon him. "You've no right to hope that you and your son can escape the full penalty of what you've done."

Father and son stared at each other.

"What do you mean?" Brent asked at last.

"You know what I mean well enough," she answered. "Where will you stand before the world, where will you stand in your own eyes, if harm has come to her?"

"You don't think—" Eugene began, then broke off. "No, no. That's nonsense. That's out of the question. Governor," he appealed to his father, "you know that's out of the question."

"Of course, of course," Brent reassured him. "It's just mother's hysterical idea. Nothing like that has happened, or is going to happen, or could happen. Don't worry about that. We can't afford to be scared now by crazy notions. The facts are bad enough. I'll have to prepare a statement for the papers. But we'll go slow till we know just what happened after you left Avalon."

"Then you do fear it," his wife persisted. "You know it is the first thing she would think of."

"For God's sake," he cried roughly, "don't drive me mad. I've got to keep my head. Hasn't Gene suffered enough without adding such senseless terrors? Let me think. We'd better hold back till we know just what the other side is going to say. There is a chance, after all, that it may be kept out of the papers, though the whole of Northmoreland must know it. Judge Beckford will suppress it if he possibly can."

"You don't blame me, Governor?" Eugene asked.

"No, no, Gene, I don't blame you at all," his father answered. "If there is any one to blame I'm the one. Maybe I should have thought more of the danger and less of the cause. But I reckon it won't turn out so badly after all. Likely enough you ran away too soon. They wouldn't have dared to harm you if you'd stood your ground. I don't doubt the girl will write to you when she knows where you are. For my part, I hope to see you married to her yet."

Reassured by his own brave words, he attempted to go on with his shaving. As he lifted the razor to his cheek the telephone rang again.

"I can't see any one for an hour at least, Molly," he said, disturbed and irritated. "I don't care who it is. I've got to pull myself together, and to think this thing out. I can't be taken off my guard. You tell them it's no use to bother me until I'm ready to see them."

Mrs. Brent had already taken down the receiver and was listening.

"It is a reporter," she said, her hand covering the receiver. "No," she answered, evidently replying to some question which came over the wire. "It is impossible. It will be an hour before Doctor Brent can see any one. A message? Yes, I will take it." She listened attentively, turning to her husband and repeating the words slowly that he might hear and weigh them. "Will Doctor Brent make a statement immediately in regard to the shooting of—" She listened a moment longer, then with a low cry let the receiver fall from her hand and leaned, white, terrible and accusing, against the wall. Twice she tried to speak. Twice failed. At last she whispered: "It has come."

"What has come?" Brent asked, turning from the glass, his face still half lathered, the razor still poised in his hand.

"The news from Avalon," she whispered. "Polly Beckford's dead. She shot herself the night Eugene fled. They know he's here. They want to see you—about that."

"Dead!" Brent gasped, the razor falling from his shaking

hand, the copper-colored skin beneath the lather suddenly grown ashen. "Dead! I don't believe it. Dead! You're lying to me! You know you're lying!"

"It is the truth, the dreadful, dreadful truth," she answered. "Face it as best you can. My sin is greatest, that I ever trusted you. Oh, God, I should have known! I should have known!"

"Dead," echoed Eugene. "That's carrying it too far, Governor. I had no idea there was any risk to her. I never thought of this for her. Poor little Polly, poor little girl! Why did she do it, Governor? Why did she do it? I can't understand it, I can't understand. Killed herself! Great God! What made her do it?"

All day long Brent was besieged by reporters. But he refused himself to every one. He would see them a little later, he sent word. The news was a great shock to him, he said. The truth was he dared not face them till he could formulate some answer to their questions.

The afternoon papers were full of the tragedy at Avalon, and of the flight of Eugene Brent. Brent dared not read, yet dared not remain ignorant of what they printed. He saw in the first sensing of the glaring head-lines, in the crude cuts of the imaginary scene at Avalon—his own likeness bracketed above—that he was utterly condemned; in the eyes of the public Polly Beckford had not committed suicide, he and his son had murdered her.

His first care had been to smuggle Eugene out of the hotel to a flat which Adriance had taken, where he could remain concealed from the reporters.

Then he summoned Bamford. The agent came, pale and shaken. Couldn't the general do something? Wasn't there another side to the story? Of course it wouldn't be safe to open the doors of Carnegie Hall that night unless the general wished to be mobbed.

As they conferred the manager of the hotel sent up to ask how soon Doctor Brent would find it convenient to leave the hotel.

Acting upon this intimation Brent, with Mrs. Brent, followed Eugene; and it was from the safe shelter of Adriance's flat that he saw the storm rage. His lectures were, of course, abandoned. It was doubtful if he could ever again appear before a white audience. But he did not yield without a struggle. Every effort was made to put his case before the public in the best light possible. Every extenuating circumstance was dwelt upon.

He did not, he said, feel that he should be condemned for the tragic sequel to the interrupted wedding. The burden of that awful happening must rest upon the shoulders of his white neighbors. It was only one more of the countless tragedies which must be charged against the blind race prejudice they fostered, which they rated above the dictates of humanity, above religion itself.

In answer to the damning charges of having chosen as their victim a lovely and unsuspecting girl, Brent boldly replied that his son had confided the secret of his birth to Polly Beckford soon after their engagement, that her affection had outweighed her inherited prejudice and she asked only that her father and mother should never know. Polly Beckford had taken her own life when she learned that the secret was known and that she could never hope to marry Eugene.

This version of the tragedy was given wide circulation, and, in some quarters, the Brents received the benefit of the doubt. But the lie was too monstrous to obtain credence in the South, and its publication only served to arouse a more terrible wrath than had yet been displayed against Brent and his son.

In Virginia there was wild talk of mob violence, of burning Comorn to the ground. But the cooler heads prevailed and no outbreak occurred. Retribution could find no victim. Hor-tense and Celia remained at Comorn unmolested.

About six weeks after the funeral of Polly Beckford it was reported in Northmoreland that Mrs. Brent had returned to Comorn Hall. The report was true.

When Mrs. Brent, restless and ill at ease in Adriance's

flat, and anxious regarding Celia, proposed returning to Virginia, Brent had readily acquiesced. He felt that the treatment accorded his wife would give some indication of what he might expect when he ventured back. He therefore awaited the arrival of her first letter with keen impatience.

Mrs. Brent had learned from Hortense and from Joe Macie, she wrote, that feeling had been at fever heat, and that it still smoldered. Eugene, as he knew, could never return, and she doubted his own safety if he returned too soon. Perhaps if he came in quietly, as she had come, avoiding the steamer and crossing in a launch from the nearest railway point in Maryland, his presence might cause no demonstration on the part of his white neighbors.

She heard that Judge Beckford seemed completely stricken, that he was changed, and aged and broken. He scarcely ever spoke of his daughter, and was seldom heard to mention the names of either Eugene or his father. This, at least, was the report Joe Macie brought them. Mrs. Beckford had been ill, her life despaired of for a time. It was said that Judge Beckford would take her to California as soon as she was able to travel, and that Avalon would be closed. The gossip was that neither the judge nor Mrs. Beckford would ever return to reopen the house. She thought it would be better for Brent to defer all thought of visiting Comorn until after Avalon was closed.

Ten days later Mrs. Brent wrote that Judge Beckford and Mrs. Beckford had left for California.

Soon after Mrs. Brent's departure for Virginia, Mamie Ann Dandridge joined her brother in New York, and thus took up her residence in the same house with Doctor Brent.

"You get next to him, Mamie," Adriance said to her the day of her arrival. "He's under a cloud just now, but that doesn't matter. He's the kind of man that's bound to come back the way they least expect, and if we make ourselves solid with him now we've got him for keeps. I know his plans. They're colossal. I think he'll be a big man yet."

"Of course he will," his sister answered with perfect un-

derstanding. "You leave it to me. I'm going to be useful to him now; he'll have plenty of chances to be useful to me later. I simply hate that chalk-faced wife of his, and I don't care if I make her worry a little."

Mrs. Mamie Ann Dandridge realized that Brent's star would shine again and she determined that as much of its refulgence as possible should fall upon herself.

CHAPTER XL

THE LEAGUE TAKES SHAPE

In the seclusion of Adriance's flat during the long days when Brent feared to be seen upon the streets far-reaching plans took shape.

Though Brent did not despair of ultimately regaining the ground which he had lost with the white race yet there was consolation in the knowledge that even if he failed his own people stood solidly behind him, refusing to admit that any blame attached to him or to his son for Polly Beckford's death.

There was a time when the tragic happening at Avalon staggered his calculations and, fearing that his career in America was at an end, he cast about for a new sphere of action. He thought of leading an exodus of his people; perhaps of founding a new state in Africa or Haiti. But a closer study of the situation soon convinced him that the time had not come for such a movement. The fate of Liberia did not invite emulation. He was perhaps an opportunist, but he was not an adventurer.

In Africa there was the barrier of language. In Haiti there were no common ambitions to be aroused, no universal hate to be played upon. Only in America were there millions of his race who spoke the same language, shared the same experiences, felt the same hopes and discouragements, and who could be roused to action by the same appeal. In America only could words be used as weapons, could ideas become explosives.

Brent had long since awakened to a realization that as often as not it is the surprising thing which happens, that history is still in the making, that nothing is impossible to one who can direct the current of events. He saw clearly that the world belonged to those, able or otherwise, who secured the strategic positions and held them.

Apprehending these things he sought to place himself in the current of circumstances where fortune might most readily sweep him onward to the height he meant to attain. He had the intellect to plan vast combinations, always a source of power, and he believed he possessed both the means and personality to give them effect.

It was at this time of his enforced retirement that Brent, encouraged by Adriance and by Bishop Comfort, whom he now and again called in consultation, laid the foundations of a vast organization to be known as the League of the Black Crusaders which was to consolidate all the wealth and power of the negro race in one gigantic trust.

A new political party was to be formed, a party composed exclusively of negro voters, and having for its sole purpose the advancement of the interests of the American negro; a party which should hold the balance of power and so be able to dictate terms to the nation.

Unity of purpose, concerted action, these were to be the first aims of the new party. Doctor Brent, as president general, was to be supreme head of the League.

Vice-governors were to be appointed for every state, who should be answerable to the president general for the discipline and efficiency of the Crusaders under his command. Each vice-governor was to be represented by deputies, one for every town or county, and under these were to be vice-deputies, for every township.

A network was in this way to be spread over the entire country by means of which each member of the race could be known and would be within immediate reach of the president general.

The League was to be represented in cities, towns and rural communities by preachers and school-teachers whose influence was to become political as well as spiritual, social and educational. Thus the closest possible relations were to be established with the negro churches and schools throughout the land.

All negro bishops, headed by Bishop Comfort as supreme

grand chaplain, were by virtue of their office to become grand chaplains of the League.

All existing secret fraternal and benevolent societies were to be fostered and affiliated in this vast and elastic octopus. Men high in such societies were to be conciliated by being grouped about the president general in a "cabinet" comprising his chief advisers, and from among whom a successor was to be chosen by vote upon the resignation, death or removal of the president general.

The highest obligation of any member was to his own race as represented by the League. Therefore the will of the president general could supersede all law.

The purpose of the League was to demonstrate the power and importance of the black citizens of the United States; to compel the repeal of all Jim Crow laws; to put an end to lynch law and mob violence, by peaceful means if possible, by armed force if necessary; to secure justice and absolute equality at the polls in every southern state. Social equality was to be demanded and secured. Congress was to be asked to pension all persons beyond a certain age who had been born in slavery.

Not only were equal rights to be demanded, but a place in the councils of the nation commensurate with the proportion the negro population held to the white population.

A policy of incessant agitation was to be inaugurated, educational publicity was to be sought; resistance was no longer to be passive, silent nor unsupported.

There was to be a great social advance, a great political advance, there was also to be a great economic advance. Through the agency of the League Brent proposed to give reality to his financial dreams and theories.

His scheme contemplated the establishment of a strong central bank in New York, with which were to be connected branch banks in every town and county in the South. This central bank was to be the depository of the savings of the negro race. It was to finance the negro and reconstruct the economic basis of the cotton states.

And over all the millions of his people, over all their banks

and lodges, and industrial enterprises, in their homes and in their churches a new banner was to float in challenge and in promise to the world; a sable banner cleft by a crimson cross, the flag of the League of the Black Crusaders.

It was a dream of power, murky, lurid, mighty, but far less fantastic and seemingly impossible than that Invisible Empire of the Ku-Klux-Klan which had once held the South in its grip of terror.

Given something to do, some definite objective, the response of his race, Brent believed, would be tremendous. The citizen was tired of his passive rôle, and the race, like the individual, longed to assert itself, to test its strength, to court publicity, to be sententious in the public business, to be admired and feared. As its aggressive leader, though now disregarded, he would soon be a formidable figure in the life of the republic.

Months would, of course, be required in perfecting the League, and heavy expense would of necessity be incurred. But Brent, undaunted, caught in the glamour of the great enterprise and already seeing himself a political dictator and the master of countless millions, declared he could supply the money needed from the profits of his lecture tour. If more were required he stood ready to call in all his outstanding loans, and even to return to Virginia and, by mortgaging Comorn Hall, raise additional thousands to aid in establishing the League. When he could lecture again his earnings should be applied to the same ends.

Full of his plans his courage and assurance returned. His manner once more became the splendid thing it had been. Urbane and gracious, a sense of power went with him; he had never been more imposing. He began to show himself again, upon the streets with Eugene, or driving with Mamie Ann in an open carriage in the park.

When reporters attempted to interview him he no longer sought to avoid them. He was non-committal in his utterances, but confident. Let the world misjudge him as it would it was evident to all that he still retained his good opinion of himself.

It was during this time that Adriance, for whom the post of secretary and treasurer of the League had been reserved, and whose newly established paper, *The Black Crusader*, was to be its official organ, found an opportunity of bringing to Doctor Brent's notice two young stockbrokers, partners in the firm of Banister and Nelson.

Banister and Nelson, though white men, were immensely impressed by Brent's financial theories and were eager to act as his agents and practical advisers in laying the foundation of his banking system. Ambitious and plausible, but none too scrupulous, they soon succeeded in establishing themselves in Brent's confidence. They further strengthened their hold upon him by offering Eugene a position in their Wall Street office until the time should come for him to take up his duties as assistant secretary of the League.

Brent, feeling the need of large sums, was soon induced to place all his available capital in the hands of his new friends, hoping to double or treble the amount and thus be in a better position to meet the cost of financing the project he had so much at heart.

Not long after Judge Beckford left Northmoreland Brent wrote to Colonel Macie asking him to realize on the mortgage which he held on Piccadilly as soon as it fell due.

He also desired the carpetbagger to sell, at public sale if necessary, his interest in the *Rappahannock Oyster Shell*. Brent took this course with a certain grim satisfaction as he understood the Honorable Gus had, in the stress of recent events, permitted himself to use language in the *Oyster Shell* at variance with what he chose to consider his interests.

In accordance with these instructions Colonel Macie at once acquainted Colonel Washington with the contents of his client's letter. He also wrote, but in a very different tone, to the Honorable Gus Wyatt.

Colonel Macie's letter fell like an exploding bomb in the midst of the crowded household at Piccadilly. It had been tacitly understood by all the family that Mrs. Beverley would

at once check over to Colonel Washington the four thousand dollars required to meet the mortgage when it should fall due. Mrs. Washington indeed had fully expected her sister to do this the day she returned from Baltimore, and she could not forbear saying to the colonel, in the privacy of their apartment, that she thought it very strange her sister did not mention the mortgage, especially as she had said so much about it before she took the money to the city. The colonel, replying that it would be just as good the next day or the next year, had then gone directly to sleep to close the conversation.

At the coming of Colonel Macie's letter it was supposed that now at last Mrs. Beverley would draw on the bank. But when day followed day and she made no allusion to the matter even the good colonel was forced to acknowledge that it did seem strange, and finally to own that, view it as he would, he could not understand "Cousin Jinny's" silence.

Mrs. Washington's impulse was to speak frankly to her sister, but this the colonel forbade her to do. His finer fiber had detected an imperceptible something which told him as plainly as any words could have done that Mrs. Beverley did not wish to be approached on the subject.

He felt sure the mood would pass. Mrs. Beverley had no fondness for money as money, although during the last year she had developed a strained and painful parsimony, and could not be induced to sign a check at all; the few she had signed months before were for the smallest sums.

Naturally "Cousin Jinny" wished to keep what she had for her children, said the colonel; she did not realize how impossible it was for him to raise the money, or to sell his place to advantage in so short a time. She did not realize how unprepared he was, as, after his easy-going fashion, he had counted upon being able to renew the mortgage without difficulty.

He wrote to Colonel Macie asking if the carpetbagger himself could not take up the mortgage. Colonel Macie replied that he regretted his inability to oblige Colonel Washington; every penny which he had to lend was already well invested.

He trusted Colonel Washington would not encounter any trouble in meeting his obligations as his client had made it plain that he should need the money at the time it fell due.

Watt asked his uncle for this letter and himself put it in his mother's hands.

"How terrible it is," Mrs. Beverley said, "how terrible for your poor Uncle Jim."

But she made no offer of assistance, and Watt returned to his uncle shaking his head in angry perplexity.

"No use. Mother doesn't seem to understand," he said, his heart filled with sullen disapproval and surprise.

Ada and Agnes shared their brother's wonder. It would, they thought, have been their mother's first impulse to relieve their uncle. Of course she had only been keeping the money for them, and how wise it was that she had kept the sum unbroken, but now in the face of this great necessity surely the time had come to use it.

Mrs. Washington at last gave herself up to despair and took no pains to conceal their straitened circumstances. The fare became plainer and more scant. Bills which Colonel Washington had promised to meet were put off, and he feared to increase them. He grew sensitive about passing Mr. Hesketh's grocery. One by one his sons refused to go to the Cross Roads for the weekly supplies of provisions.

But Miss Page never hesitated. She entered the poor little store with all her old assurance, giving her orders with a tone which was itself a guarantee of the solvency of the household at Piccadilly. There might be doubts about the Bank of England, though personally Miss Page did not entertain them, but there was no doubt whatever when it came to the financial reliability of Colonel Washington. The mortgage on Piccadilly should be paid off to the last penny, Miss Page told herself a hundred times, even if it had to be paid in Confederate money.

Some weeks after the receipt of Colonel Macie's letter in regard to the mortgage Colonel Washington received another communication from the carpetbagger.

Doctor Brent, while he did not care to renew the mortgage, had written to suggest that if Colonel Washington and his family desired to stay on at Piccadilly as his tenants he would not object. He further suggested that as there had been trouble in the public school, Ada or Agnes Beverley might like to act as governess for his daughter Celia.

The colonel's face was purple when he grasped the full significance of Doctor Brent's proposal.

"Dear me," said Miss Page, "it's a wonder he doesn't offer me a position as cook in his kitchen, or say that his wife will send me the laundry. The idea! The very idea! The impudence! I do declare it's a trial to one's patience to have a nigger act like that. It certainly is."

Mrs. Beverley listened but made no comment. She was greatly changed. She seemed to shrink away in strange aloofness from her children and from all about her, until her face wore the look of a wan waxen mask behind which she strove to conceal a spirit which was poignantly tortured. Her eyes had taken on a hunted look. She never smiled, she sat for hours alone in her room, or would wander away and pace the beach under the low bluff out of sight of the house.

Watt and Agnes wondered. Ada became alarmed. Watt argued in private with his mother, so too did Agnes. They told her of their uncle's desperate need of the money. They dwelt on his kindness to them, they asked her if she wished to see him lose Piccadilly. They told her that if he did lose it she would be directly responsible.

Mrs. Beverley urged in reply that the money could be found elsewhere, that it was not necessary to sacrifice their little all when there were bankers and lawyers who could advance the sum just as it had already been advanced by Doctor Brent.

These arguments were always ended by Mrs. Beverley weeping bitterly and Watt retiring in despair. After such an experience there were days when Mrs. Beverley would absent herself from the table. She could not meet her sister, she could not bear to eat her sister's bread.

His mother's failure to aid his uncle was to Watt as the very

lees and dregs of his humiliation. How, he asked, could others be expected to assist the colonel when it was well known that Mrs. Beverley could so easily extricate him from his embarrassing position.

This was an actual barrier in several quarters where the colonel applied in the hope of being able to transfer the mortgage. It was incredible that Mrs. Beverley would permit her brother-in-law to lose Piccadilly rather than draw out the money she had on deposit in Baltimore. No one could believe it.

Not long after Colonel Macie's last letter had been received, Mrs. Washington, when all were seated at the table, asked what reply the colonel intended making to Doctor Brent's proposal that they remain at Piccadilly as his tenants. Then disregarding her husband's signals, she added, her voice sharpened by anxiety:

"If we had taken a little more care of our own and had not thought so much of others I don't suppose our children would ever have been homeless or dependent on a negro's charity."

Mrs. Beverley made a brave effort to control herself, but suddenly her lips trembled, and rising hastily she left the room. Mrs. Washington looked after her sister alarmed and bewildered.

"Your mother seems so strange lately," she whispered to Agnes, while those at the table regarded one another in silence.

"Pass the corn bread, if you please, Cousin Page," the colonel said, frowning at his wife.

Mrs. Washington burst into tears.

"I can't help it. It's true. You know it is, Cousin James. I can't sit by in silence and see my children turned out of their home to go to the poorhouse even if you can."

Colonel Washington lifted his head.

"Madam," said he, addressing Mrs. Washington with something very much like sternness, "Jinny may be your sister, but I must beg you, ma'am, to remember that she is my guest, and I will not permit even my own dear wife to occasion my guests discomfort by any remarks or actions of any kind whatever.

I am a Virginian, ma'am, and I expect my house, while it remains mine, to be conducted like the home of a Virginian gentleman. Cousin Page, ma'am, can I trouble you to pass Agnes the corn bread? Thank you, ma'am."

"I can't eat," Agnes murmured, "it chokes me."

Watt stared at his plate and frowned. "I simply can't make mother out," he said.

"I'm sure I didn't mean to hurt sister's feelings," Mrs. Washington began.

The colonel rose and left the table and the house.

Mrs. Washington followed Agnes and Watt up the narrow stairs to the door of Mrs. Beverley's room. The door was locked.

"Mama," Agnes called, as she tapped upon the door, "Mama, won't you let me in? What's the matter, dear? Please tell us."

There was no answer.

"Sister," called Mrs. Washington, not unmoved by the stifled sobs she heard and convinced by her husband's disapproval that she had been wrong. "Sister, don't mind what I said. You know I didn't mean anything. Well, I simply do not understand what has come over her," she added as no answer came from within.

"Mother," Watt cried, shaking the door roughly. "Mother, let me in, won't you? You'll make yourself ill, and then we'll have to pay the doctor. You might as well remember that. Please open the door. Mother!" he called again, then as no answer came, he shook the door with all his strength. "Mother, this is nonsense! Let me in!"

In his excitement he would have thrown himself against the door, but Ada interposed.

"Watt! how dare you!" she exclaimed. "Don't you know you only worry mother. Auntie, take Agnes down-stairs, please. Watt, are you trying to comfort your mother or to make her ill by shaking that door? Let it alone and go down-stairs."

"What will you do?" Watt asked angrily. He was indig-

nant because his mother had made a scene, indignant because she would not open the door. Man-like he resented her silent refusal. He felt baffled.

"I shall sit down and wait till mother opens the door," Ada answered as she drew Watt away. "Please go, Watt, or you may always regret it. Go. I'm afraid just as I was that night at Avalon."

With a startled look Watt went at once. Ada remained at the door, waiting patiently.

"Mama, dear mama," she whispered now and again, never losing patience when no answer came. And no answer did come until the shadows were stretching themselves out to sleep in the twilight as the sun sank into the west.

Then when Ada had called for the fiftieth time, "Mama, dear mama," her mother's voice answered:

"Are you alone, Ada?"

"Yes, mother."

Then after a little while the door was opened to her pleading, and she crept in to comfort her mother. For a long time she only sat silently on the edge of the bed with her arms around her mother's neck, while Mrs. Beverley sobbed with her cheek pressed close to hers.

"You are so good, Ada, so kind and good, so like your father. If it were not for you I couldn't endure it another hour, I couldn't."

CHAPTER XLI

ANXIOUS DAYS AT PICCADILLY

The situation at Piccadilly daily grew more tense and tragic as the date approached for the payment of the mortgage. A sense of gloom and disaster hung over the household. Mrs. Beverley secluded herself as much as possible, but could not always avoid being present when the all absorbing topic was discussed. At such times she sat in mute despair until some thoughtless speech of her sister's or some rough word of her son's would drive her away to the shelter of her own room.

"What is the matter with mother?" Watt asked angrily when such a scene had been repeated for the twentieth time. "What can it be? Can't you tell me, Agnes?"

He had followed Mrs. Washington and Agnes into the parlor.

"I can't tell you," Agnes answered hopelessly as she sank on the springless hair sofa which stood between the windows. "Mother is a complete enigma to me. That she should care so much about money is the one thing I never expected in this world. Why won't she loan Uncle Jim that miserable money?"

"Oh! if she would, if she only would," wailed Mrs. Washington.

They sat in silence for a moment.

"We might as well look matters squarely in the face," Watt said at last. "Mother's attitude is simply beyond belief. What good it is doing her to take this course is the thing I can't see. She isn't happy about it. All you need do is to look at her face to know that. She's utterly miserable about it, but she won't give in." He hesitated and his manner was very grave when he spoke again. "It's so unlike mother that I simply

can't understand it unless," and again he hesitated, as though fearful or ashamed to speak, "unless all this trouble we've been through has affected her mind, and she thinks she's guarding the money for us. It looks to me more like mania of that sort than anything else I can think of."

"Oh, Watt!" Agnes cried in protest. "Oh, Watt! you don't think that."

"Well, what else can I think?" her brother asked. "I'd rather think that than believe mother understood the situation perfectly and then wouldn't help Uncle Jim. Mother never was close about money before in her whole life. You know that, everybody knows it. Now she grudges spending a cent. We could get along without things; mother was right to want to keep the money together. I see that now, but it's this injustice to Uncle Jim that I can't comprehend. He's worried to death. He doesn't know which way to turn. Every one knows mother can take up the mortgage, and every one thinks she will. People might get together and help him if they weren't so certain mother would do it. Uncle Jim certainly has been good to us, and here we're leaving him to face ruin for nothing at all but a whim. I can't stand it. I'll never forgive mother as long as I live if she lets that nigger turn Uncle Jim out of this house. Never! Never!"

"I don't know what your mother expects to do when this place is handed over to that colored man," said Mrs. Washington, applying her handkerchief to her eyes. "It certainly seems to me it would be cheaper to save Piccadilly than for you-all to buy another farm. That's all I said to your mother. I only said to her, 'Why don't you buy this place for the amount of the mortgage, for if you won't lend James the money, at least,' I said, 'it would save the scandal and disgrace of our being turned out by a negro. And then,' I said, 'you could let us stay here with you-all for a little while until Colonel Washington could find some shelter for us.' I said we'd not need to stay very long, not as long as you-all have stayed with us and welcome. And all the answer I got was to see your mother go out of the room with her hands over her

face, making me feel that I'd said something cruel. But you see, Agnes, and you see, Watt, if your mother would buy Piccadilly just for the value of the mortgage it would be a real bargain, and for the matter of that we could move out very quickly if your mother objected to our being here. All I want is to save your Uncle James from the humiliation of being turned out of his home by that wicked negro. It's hard on my boys, but I don't think of that. I think of your Uncle Jim. He isn't a young man any more. It's going to be a trial to him to begin all over again in a strange place."

And at this thought poor Mrs. Washington broke down and wept.

"Don't you worry, aunt," Watt said, trying to comfort her. "Don't worry. I'll speak to mother again as soon as she's calm. I'll have a talk with her to-morrow and learn once and for all if she will help Uncle Jim or not."

The next morning when Watt returned from the club house, which he still shared with Douglas Hamilton, he wore a look of grim determination. He asked for his mother. Mrs. Beverley, sensing the ordeal which awaited her, came down the stairs and together they went outside and walked slowly along the path which followed the line of the bluff above the river. Mrs. Beverley seemed to have aged during the night. Her face looked even more worn and haggard, her eyes had a more hopeless, frightened, haunted look in their depths.

The interview came to nothing. Mrs. Beverley held out as best she could against her son's arguments and entreaties.

"Well, mother," Watt said at last in a dull, bitter tone which hurt her more than his reproaches, "if you won't do anything there's nothing left but to make another effort to raise the money somewhere else. There isn't much chance of succeeding, for the place is so worn out and run down it won't bring much more than the mortgage at a forced sale, and everybody knows it. Macie's about the only man in this locality who has ready money, and he's refused to take it up. Judge Beckford might have helped Uncle Jim if he'd been here, but he's in California and it's too late to reach him now.

All we can do is to try old Mr. Fauntleroy at Warsaw. He may have the money on hand and if he has he may take up the mortgage to oblige Uncle Jim. We can ask him at least. We've wasted too much time already. I was so certain you would do it in the end. There's no hope of getting the money at any bank. It's got to be some one who knows Uncle Jim. Mr. Fauntleroy's the only man I can think of."

"Oh, if he will only help," his mother cried. "Oh, Watt, why haven't you thought of him before?"

"Then you do care if Uncle Jim loses the place?"

"Care!" Mrs. Beverley echoed with trembling lips. "Care! Oh, Watt, you couldn't have thought that I did not care. Your Uncle Jim has done everything for us. We owe him so much."

"But you won't help him yourself. You leave it to some one else to do that."

Mrs. Beverley made no reply. Watt left her and returned to the house.

"Well?" Agnes asked as he entered. "What did mother say?"

"It's no use. She won't give in," he answered. "It's no use to urge her any more. We'd better try somewhere else, and try quick while we've got the chance. I've thought of old Mr. Fauntleroy over at Warsaw. He sometimes has money to lend, and he's a cousin of Uncle Jim's. It's worth trying."

"Oh, yes. It's well worth trying," Mrs. Washington said. "Your Uncle Jim had better write him to-night."

"No," said Watt, "Uncle Jim needn't write. There isn't time. We'll drive over to Warsaw to-morrow to see him. That's the best way."

All fixed hopefully upon the idea of securing the money from their Cousin Fauntleroy. He was the last straw at which the family at Piccadilly clutched in their despair.

A murmur of voices came up to Mrs. Beverley, who had followed Watt into the house and now sat sewing by her window.

"I know they are talking about me," she said to Ada, who was busy at her side. "I know it. Every day I hear them whispering. They condemn me. I know they condemn me."

She put her work aside and looked out across the fields, across the river. The early summer had touched the landscape. The woods were green again.

"Oh, I am growing so bitter," she sighed wearily, pressing her hands to her aching temples. "So harsh in my judgment of those I love so dearly. Every word of Watt's hurts me. And Agnes condemns me, too. They think me a miser. They think I'll be glad to see their Uncle Jim ruined."

"Oh, no, mother, no," Ada said, slipping her arms about her mother. "They don't mean to be cruel. Watt says a great many things he doesn't mean at all. He never can realize that others may be just as anxious as he is. Poor Watt, he's all unstrung since Polly Beckford's death."

"I know he is, I know."

But the dreadful suspense was not to continue forever. Early the next morning Watt and Colonel Washington set out for Warsaw to interview old Mr. Fauntleroy. The colonel said he meant to have a look at a farm that he heard could be rented and which was but little out of their way. It was evident he had not the highest hopes of the success of their expedition. If they failed in Warsaw there was no chance of succeeding elsewhere, and the move to a rented farm no longer seemed the impossibility it had appeared only a few days before.

Mrs. Beverley was alone in her room when, late in the day, Watt and Colonel Washington returned. She dared not look from the window. She knew she would read the result in Watt's face if she saw him as he approached the house. She waited and listened. She heard Watt and the colonel enter together. There was a silence below. Then she could hear Mrs. Washington weeping aloud. She knew they had failed. It was like a death blow. She lifted her thin hands and pressed them over her heart. In a moment steps sounded on the stairs. It was Watt coming up. He came to the door and opened it without knocking. He was haggard and stern.

"Mother," he said in a harsh voice, "mother, I wish you would go down-stairs to the parlor for a moment. I'll come."

"You didn't succeed at Warsaw?" she asked with dry lips.

"No, Mr. Fauntleroy hadn't the money on hand. There's only one thing left to be done. Please go down-stairs to the others. I'll come."

Mrs. Beverley rose and left the room. She was trembling from head to foot as she descended the stairs. She felt a wild impulse to rush out of the house, to hide herself in the woods, in the swamps, anywhere where no one could find her until she died. But she controlled herself and entered the parlor. It was like the chamber of death. As she crossed the threshold a sharp cracking sound came from her room overhead. She knew that Watt had broken open her bureau drawer. There was a pause. He was searching for something, she knew. Her heart seemed to cease beating. A paralysis seemed to be creeping over her. She tottered and would have fallen if Ada had not supported her. Then Watt's heavy tread came down the stairs. As he entered Mrs. Beverley saw that he had her check book in his hand. Without a word he crossed the room to his uncle's desk, and seating himself, filled out a check. Then he rose and turned to his mother.

"Mother," he said, "I've filled this check out to Uncle Jim for four thousand two hundred and forty dollars, the amount due on the mortgage, and the year's interest. We can't get the money anywhere else. You've got to sign this check and save this place. It can't be put off. It's got to be done to-day. Now."

Mrs. Beverley made no answer. Watt walked over to her, with the pen in one hand and the check book in the other. There was a little table beside the chair in which she sat. He placed the check book upon it. Colonel Washington and Ada had risen in protest.

"Come," Watt said to his mother, putting Ada roughly aside and disregarding his uncle. "Come, sign it, please." He moved the little table before her. "Here's the pen," he said, "sign now. There's the place."

"Watt," said Colonel Washington, trying to interpose, "I'll

not permit this. Don't you sign that paper, Jinny, don't you do it."

"Watt!" cried Ada, pale, almost, as her mother. "Watt! You don't know what harm you may be doing. Mother shall not be coerced."

Unheeding them, Watt forced the pen into his mother's hand.

Mrs. Beverley's fingers closed mechanically upon the pen and she attempted to obey her son. But she was trembling so that her signature was illegible.

Watt took the pen from her hand and filled out another check. Mrs. Beverley sat rubbing one cold hand over the other, trying to control the muscular contraction. Watt blotted the check. He put the pen once more in his mother's hand.

"Try again," he said.

This time Mrs. Beverley wrote her name quite clearly, but as Watt drew the check away the paroxysm returned and her hand trembled so violently that the pen rattled upon the table. Ada took it from her fingers and rubbed and smoothed them. She was watching her mother's face with fear and horror.

"There, that's done," Watt said, crossing to his uncle. "I knew mother wouldn't refuse."

"I'll not touch it, sir," said the colonel.

"Watt!" It was Mrs. Beverley who spoke, but her voice was changed to a harsh unrecognizable whisper. "Watt, dear, there isn't any money in the bank at Baltimore. Do you hear me, Watt? The money was never deposited. It was stolen out of my hands on the street on the way up from the boat to the bank."

"Stolen!" Watt gasped.

"Stolen!" echoed the others.

"Stolen, mother, and you never told!" cried Ada.

"I didn't dare, I didn't dare," sobbed Mrs. Beverley. "I didn't dare to tell because I knew it would take away the little

hope you had left. I told the people at the bank, and they said it might be recovered, and I hoped and hoped. But they never found a trace of it. It was snatched out of my hand. Now, Watt and Agnes will understand why I couldn't do all the things they wanted me to do; why Agnes could not have the new dress for Polly's wedding; why I couldn't help your Uncle James; why I—"

"Mother," Watt groaned. "Oh, mother! mother!"

"Oh, don't blame me, Watt; don't blame me or I think I shall go mad." As she spoke she covered her face with her trembling hands as though to ward off a blow. The gesture had a new meaning to them now.

"I did everything I could. I hoped and hoped. I will show you all the letters from the bank. They tried, and the police, for my sake, they did all they could. I know I should have told you months and months ago, but I couldn't. I couldn't."

"Mother, and you've endured all this alone while we've been hounding you. But the figures in the bank-book?"

"I put them there myself," his mother answered, "so if you asked to see the entry you shouldn't discover the loss that way. There are only a few dollars left of the old account. I thought if I could keep the loss from you until things were more hopeful you could bear it better. Then I could tell you, and then how glad I would be to die in peace, and know that you understood and forgave me, and loved me as you did before."

"Oh, mother, mother, forgive me," Watt implored. "Forgive me for all I've done to break your heart, mother; say you forgive me, mother."

As he spoke he knelt at his mother's side, his arms about her, in a very passion of repentance and remorse and sorrow.

"When I knew you'd failed at Warsaw I'd made up my mind to kill myself as Polly did," she whispered to him, "but perhaps I don't need to do it now. I thought you would reproach me for my carelessness."

Such words upon his mother's lips told Watt that her suf-

ferings had left as deep traces upon her mind and spirit as upon her worn cheeks and in the depths of her frightened eyes.

When Mrs. Beverley looked up, instead of reproachful glances she found the entire household of Piccadilly gathered about her smiling and weeping at once, and all talking together in their desire to comfort and to reassure her.

Was that all! Let them lose the place. Nobody cared. Let the nigger have it. Let the niggers have everything. What difference did that make? Nothing mattered so long as their mother was the same mother she had always been—the same sister—the same Cousin Jinny. Mrs. Washington said the only thing that hurt her was that her own dear sister had not seemed to care. Now that she knew the reason it didn't matter to her what happened. She reckoned that Colonel Washington and Watt and Bush, and the other boys, could keep a roof over their heads one way or another. And Miss Page reckoned they certainly could or one person would be a good deal surprised, and she certainly reckoned she knew who that person was.

"It's just another pack of trouble that miserable nigger's brought upon us," the colonel said, wiping his eyes; he had never been so moved since the war. "If Julius Cæsar hadn't been so blamed ostentatious about his thundering thousand-dollar bills he'd have paid by check, and then this never would have happened in this world. And we'd all have been better off if I hadn't been such a big fool myself. That's always been my trouble, blessed if it hasn't. I knew better than to let Cousin Jinny start off for Baltimore alone. And you ain't blameless, either, Watt; the Beverley men used to attend to the Beverley business and not leave it for their women folks to do. Well, well, I always knew Cousin Jinny had some reason for what she was doing, for I saw there was something on her mind. Lord bless me, but I never thought of this. Ada, you take your dear mother up-stairs and put her straight to bed; but first you ought to bathe her feet in mustard and hot water, 'deed you ought. She's gone through enough without all this hubbub about her. I do declare to

goodness the way you children fuss and carry on you won't have any mother left before long, 'deed you won't. I reckon this'll be a lesson to you, Jinny, to hold on tighter to your pocketbook next time so your own children won't hug you to death for losing it."

Little by little the whole pitiful story was told: Mrs. Beverley's misgivings and anxieties while on the boat, and all her precautions to keep her treasure safe; how on her way to the bank in the morning she had felt frightened at the great responsibility, and held her black bag with the purse in it tight in her hand; how presently, when she was quite near the bank and her courage had returned, she saw a crowd collected on the pavement about a cab horse which had fallen. As she passed some one jostled her, in that instant the bag was snatched from her hand. The horse struggled up, the crowd scattering before it, and in the confusion the thief vanished before she could be certain even that she had seen him. When she recovered from the shock, she hurried on to the bank and told the cashier of her loss. The cashier notified the police and every effort was made to recover the money but without success. At Mrs. Beverley's earnest request her name was withheld by the bank officials and the loss was not reported in the papers.

All day long Mrs. Beverley pondered her terrible misfortune. Her brain was numbed by it. That she, their mother, had been the agent of this last calamity was a refinement of cruelty which drove her almost mad.

The course of silence which she had pursued was not determined upon at once. At first hopeful that the money might be recovered, she decided to keep the loss a secret until her hope was realized or abandoned. But as a sense of what the loss would mean to Watt and Agnes grew upon her, silence became a duty. Watt, she feared, would make no effort in the face of such discouragement, he would abandon hope and, succumbing, drift to any ruin. Nothing would matter to his hopelessness. Agnes and Ada would bear it better, it would not mean so much to them, but she dared not share the secret

with them, lest some chance word might betray it. And why, if she could keep it from Watt, why might she not spare them also? Why not leave them this little while of comfort, this brief time of hope.

She took the bank-book and entered the sum and the date. She knew her figures would never be questioned, as there were several young men in the bank who made such entries. Once only she faltered and hesitated, dimly realizing the vista of possibilities her course might mean. It was the thought of Watt which overcame her hesitation, and confirmed her resolve. The rest they knew.

In the midst of their excitement the little group was startled by a halloo from without. Doctor Carniel had driven up to the door.

At the sight of the familiar face, the whole household poured out upon him, each more eager than the other to tell him the good news that every penny the Beverleys possessed in the world had been lost, but that Mrs. Beverley had been, as they felt, found again.

"Well," said Doctor Carniel, as he sat in his buggy, while the excitement surged about its dusty wheels, "this is good news. Every cent gone! Every dollar! Splendid! splendid! It's the best news I've had in months. Well, well. I'm glad. I'm glad. I'm glad with all my heart. But I'm sorry, too." He paused and a genial twinkle kindled in his shrewd gray eyes. "I supposed you'd all be caring a lot about losing Piccadilly."

"Not a bit, sir; not a bit," cried the colonel in the best of spirits. "All anybody cared about was just that Cousin Jinny didn't seem to care. And all the time she was worrying more than all of us. We're a united family, sir. Let the nigger doctor take the old shed and welcome. If his tenant can skin the land any closer than I have he'll be an example to the county. No, sir, this place is run down and worn out, and I reckon I'd have had to move out in a year or two, anyway. Look at the roof, sir; look at the weather-boarding. No, sir, I'm glad to go, sir; I'm glad to go."

"Well, I'm sorry," Doctor Carniel repeated as he pursed his lips. "I'm mighty sorry. I just had a letter from Mason Beckford saying he wanted to get hold of that mortgage himself, and enclosing a check. But of course if you'd rather let Julius Cæsar Brent take the property, I've nothing at all to say, nothing at all to say."

With a shout the young Washingtons, with Ada and Agnes and Watt, were upon him. How he reached the ground he never knew. He remembered being borne in triumph round and round his horse and buggy. He remembered the surprised expression on his horse's face as he went by seated upon Bushrod's shoulder. Who kissed him first he could not tell, but he had a theory that it might have been Ada or Miss Page. He didn't know. He was hugged and shaken hands with, and patted on the back until he fairly begged for mercy.

"What in the world ever made you think of writing to Judge Beckford?" Mrs. Washington asked at last.

"Ada," said the doctor, "Ada told me to do it."

"Ada!" they all cried in chorus, turning upon her.

"Ada," repeated the doctor. "Ada said there was no use waiting for her mother. She said she would have been the first one in the world to offer to do it if she could. When she didn't offer Ada knew it was because she couldn't, though she didn't know why any more than you did. Ada is my girl," said the doctor fondly. "She didn't wait to see her mother worried to death, nor to see her uncle turned out of Piccadilly. She said Judge Beckford would be glad to help, that it would only ease his sorrow about Polly, and that's just what the judge says himself. Here's his letter. You take it in the house and read it, Colonel. It's just a business transaction, but the judge says the new notes can run for twenty years if you like, the longer the better when you're bedding down an oyster shore. He considers Piccadilly a gilt-edged security." He looked about him at the happy, tearful faces, and read the immense relief upon them all. "I only wish I had a little money of my own to lay out to such advantage," he added, as he saw Colonel Washington, misty-eyed and gulping vigor-

ously, retiring hastily to the seclusion of his native halls, holding Judge Beckford's letter in his hand.

"This settles it," declared Miss Page with a decision which had its mainspring in her highly wrought condition, "this certainly settles it."

"Settles what?" demanded the delighted doctor.

"I'm going to put my legal business straight into Judge Beckford's hands the minute he gets back to Avalon. I certainly am, and I'm going to have him prosecute the United States government for all the pigs and poultry the Yankees stole from pa's plantation, with compound interest. I reckon Judge Beckford will see justice done me yet. You needn't laugh," cried Miss Page with wild defiance. "I don't care if you do. But I reckon if you'd stop to calculate a drove of hogs at compound interest the way they multiply from General Lee's surrender right down to now, you'd see I have a claim that won't be any laughing matter to the federal government."

CHAPTER XLII

THE BURIAL OF LORELLA

Mrs. Brent had not been many days at Comorn Hall before Old Henrietta again took up her abode at Hamp's cabin.

"I doan' more'n half favor that white woman of Julius's," she declared. "When she comes in at one door I likes to go out at the other. The roof ain't broad enough that can cover both of us, an' that's the God's truth. I reckon you-all need me to see after Lorella now she's so low. 'Deed I disremember when I ever seen her look so mean an' puny like what she looks now. I done guess the child ain't long for this world nohow."

Lorella's condition had grown steadily less hopeful. The day of the discovery of Mrs. Beverley's loss she lay tossing restlessly upon her bed while her grandmother regarded her with stolid indifference.

"Lord, she's so thin a body'd have to shake the sheets to find her, 'deed they would," the old woman said, addressing Hamp who was seated on the threshold smoking.

"I got an awful misery in my head," Lorella moaned. "An' I got a misery in my spine. 'Deed I feels like I was a-going to drop away. Where's papa?"

Hamp rose, and shuffling to the bedside, asked with some show of real solicitude:

"What you want to say to me, Lorella? Is you resting any easier, honey?"

"No, I ain't resting no easier, papa. 'Deed I ain't resting easy into my body, an' I ain't a-resting easy into my mind. I got a heap of worries always a-comin' an' a-goin' in my head. Ain't Tiger been down the road yet to ask about Rance? Mignonette Jackson's visiting there an' Rance's been riding

the road to see her. I reckon he'll marry up with her when I'm called home. But I'd like to see him once afore I go an' take him by the hand."

"Lorella she ask you have you went down the road to Reverend Mably's like what I told you to went?" Hamp demanded, turning his glance upon his son with unqualified disfavor. "I reckon you ain't went, is you?"

"'Deed I ain't went," Tiger responded with cheerful irresponsibility. "'Deed I ain't had time to go no place, blessed if I is."

"Well, you put out an' move this minute till your heels is hot, or it'll be the worse for you," his father threatened. "You tell Mignonette, Lorella she wants to see Rance the next time he comes over from Avalon. Does you hear what I'm a-saying?"

"Ain't I listening right at you? Go 'way 'skeeter, or I'll fight you," he added with agreeable candor as he suited the action to the word. But he made no sign of rising from the chair which he had tilted back against the wall.

His grandmother eyed him without pleasure.

"'Deed if he ain't got his sitting britches on," she said. "Yes, sir, that child acts like he had a root to his foot that had growed right into the floor an' kep' him a-sitting there. I ain't no manner of use for that child nohow."

"I ain't got no root in my foot, an' I ain't got no sitting britches on," Tiger answered sullenly, rising from his chair.

"You take an' tell Mignonette I wants to see her, too," Lorella whispered, beckoning her brother to come nearer. "You tell her I ain't no hard feelings left. Some folks calls her Mrs. Williams already," she added plaintively. "But she ain't that yet. But nobody'll dispute with her about Rance when I am gone." Then after Tiger had left the cabin she gasped: "Papa, I'm scared."

"What you scared for, Lorella?" Hamp asked, taking her hand in his to comfort her. "You ain't no cause to be scared, is you?"

"Yes, I is got cause, papa. My feet an' hands feels like

they was froze when I gets to thinking mebbly my time's come. I been to a heap of funerals, an' I never cared nothing about who the corpse was or who the corpse wasn't, but when you got to be the corpse yourself there's a heap of difference, papa, 'deed there is."

She paused, staring at the ceiling and breathing heavily. At last her eyes rolled slowly and fixed their frightened gaze again upon her father's face.

"Doan' you go an' bury me alive, will you, papa, if I drops off like I was dead? Doan' you be in no hurry to put me in the ground. Promise, papa?"

Hamp shivered at the thought.

"I ain't gwine bury you alive, honey. Just you rest easy into your mind. I pass you my promise I ain't."

"What'd Hamp bury you alive for?" Old Hetty asked, her professional interest aroused. "You doan' talk like you was more'n half-witted. I reckon I can tell a cold corpse when I sees one. Ain't I laid out my tens an' hundreds; washed 'em an' laid 'em out in their grave clothes? I doan' reckon I'll lay you out till I'se satisfied into my own mind you is fast dead an' gone to glory."

But the girl only muttered in her miserable fear:

"You-all better be keerful about how you go laying me out; an' doan' you forget I wants a pretty coffin from Warsaw like what the white folks has. Rance he won't give nothing, but papa's got money. Papa's got all them thousand-dollar bills in that glass jar that's hid up the chimney. Papa's got—"

"Hold your tongue," Old Hetty cried sharply. "Doan' you talk so big about what yo' papa has an' what yo' papa hasn't. All he gets he gets from his brother Julius."

"I ain't gwine to be buried into no pine box like I was a dog when papa's got all the money I know he's got," Lorella protested. She lifted herself dizzily and tremblingly in the bed and pointed with a wasted hand toward the window-ledge. "You look there, papa," she whispered. "I been keeping them two tin cans an' that broken tumbler to hold flowers on top of my grave. You listen to me, papa. I wants the oyster

can put to the top of the grave, an' the salmon can to the foot, an' the tumbler in the middle. An' you put flowers into them, not summer flowers like anybody can have, but them artificials off my hats. The forget-me-nots from the hat I was married in that Miss Ada give me, an' the roses from the hat Miss Agnes give me. They'll stay pretty longer than summer flowers. An' doan' you forget to bury me deep, papa. I doan' want no pigs come rooting me up like they did Lily May's baby that they buried back in the pine bushes. Put me down deep. I wants to lay right there till Judgment Day. You tell any white man or nigger if he ever plows up the ground where I'm a laying I'll riz up an' ha'nt him the longest day he lives. I doan' want no barefoot niggers drapping corn over my head. How is God's angels gwine to find me in a corn-field? You tell them deacons they'd better get that cemetery lot paid for or I'll riz up an' ha'nt them, too. 'Deed it seems to me I got more to fret an' worry me than most well folks is, 'deed I has," she complained bitterly. "Oh, God, I ain't got no friend but you, papa, no friend but you. Rance he don't care, an' Mignonette's counting the days till I'm gone to God so she can marry Rance. Oh, Lord, have mercy. I been a sinner, but it don't seem like I ought to lay an' suffer an' others up an' out an' carrying on. Oh, God, I knows my sin, but pass me by, Lord, pass me by. I ain't ready, Lord, no, no, I ain't ready, 'deed I ain't."

With a stifled moan she sank back upon her pillow, her eyes became fixed and stared unseeing at the blackened rafters overhead.

Late that afternoon Doctor Carniel, stopping at the cabin on his way home from Piccadilly, told of the discovery that Mrs. Beverley had been robbed the year before in Baltimore.

"But I don't reckon any colored family will be moving into Piccadilly for all that," he added with satisfaction as Old Hetty began loudly protesting her surprise and sorrow at "Miss Jinny's" loss. "No, Judge Beckford's going to take over the mortgage till it is convenient for Colonel Washington to pay it off, and the thief may be found and the money re-

covered after all. Take good care of Lorella," he said as he turned to the door. "I'm going down into Lancaster County to-morrow for a consultation; it's a bad case and I may be gone a week. If Lorella needs anything while I'm away you'd better send for Doctor Bibby."

"What he mean by money recovered?" the albino asked when Doctor Carniel had gone.

"He means they'll try to trace the thief an' get the money back, that's what he means," his mother answered. "'Deed I doan' trust that meddling old fool."

"You doan' reckon they 'spicions any one already?"

"How can I tell? They ain't made a sign before, but then they didn't know it till to-day. A body can't tell which way the cat'll jump now. Lorella she got to hold her tongue. An' doan' you let no white man question you if I ain't by to answer him. The tongue that don't wag don't make no mischief. 'Deed I'm sorry Mason Beckford had to put in his oar. I was a-hoping to see Jim Washington turned out of Piccadilly and hoeing corn in a black man's field before I closed my eyes in Jesus."

Twilight was falling as the sound of voices gave warning of the approach of Mignonette Jackson and the Mably girls. Lorella was conscious as they entered and her eyes were at once attracted by a white waist, elaborately embroidered and profusely trimmed with imitation silver lace, with which Mignonette had bedecked herself. The girl's bold face was heavily powdered and she bore about her the scent of cheap perfumery. Quite unabashed by the knowledge that she had lured away Lorella's husband, she advanced to the bedside and looked down upon the sufferer.

"Tiger he say you wanted to see me to ask about Rance Williams. Some folks that can't mind their own business keeps a-mixing my name an' Rance's up together; say we is going to get married just as soon as you die, but 'deed there ain't no truth in it. If you was dead an' buried I wouldn't marry Rance. 'Deed I wouldn't take him if he was a precious gift. Mama don't want me to marry nobody nohow."

"What a lie," scoffed Tiger from his tilted chair. "Everybody knows you're only waiting for Lorella to pass away to step into her tracks. Didn't I hear you telling Jasemine Mamie that Rance give you that waist you've got on your back? Didn't I hear you say it cost him six dollars in Fredericksburg? What Rance paying out his good money for clothes for you if—"

"Ain't you no sense nor manners left, you low down dirty nigger?" Mignonette cried, turning fiercely upon Tiger. "Doan' you talk to no colored lady like that or you'll get your black face smacked. Mama made this waist for me with her own hands. She got the silver lace and the lawn from Mrs. Beckford after Polly Beckford shot herself."

"If I was to die," Lorella whispered, her wistful eyes feasting hungrily upon the showy tinsel, "I'd wish to be laid out in a waist like that. Papa's got the money, and—"

At the mention of the money her grandmother broke in with voluble promises that Lorella should have her wish. 'Deed there wouldn't be nothing too grand for her to be laid out in when the Lord called her, 'deed there wouldn't. But it was necessary for Hamp to add his assurance before Lorella would be satisfied.

The next day Lorella sank into a heavy stupor and a death-like trance ensued. Doctor Carniel being absent, Hamp sent Tiger to the Cross Roads to summon Doctor Bibby. When the doctor came all his efforts to rouse Lorella were unavailing. On the third day of the trance he could detect no signs of life and pronounced her dead.

On the following day Hamp was persuaded to allow the body to be placed in a coffin, but he still believed Lorella to be living and stubbornly refused to give his consent to the funeral which his mother and Rance Williams, who had now appeared upon the scene in the picturesque character of the bereaved husband, had decided should take place the third day after Doctor Bibby had pronounced Lorella dead.

Hamp, strong in conviction but weak in argument, endeavored to gain time by insisting that Lorella should not

be buried until a waist similar to the one worn by Mignonette and admired by Lorella could be procured in accordance with his solemn promise.

When this cause of delay came to Mignonette's ears she was first seized with a strange impatience, and then, upon a hint from Rance, hurried to the cabin carrying the waist which Lorella had "fancied," and which Old Henrietta accepted in much the same spirit in which it was given and at once placed upon the body. But still Hamp temporized.

On the morning of the day set for the funeral he still retained his conviction that Lorella was alive. He was even sure that she saw and heard all that went on about her in the little cabin.

"Doan' you have no fears, papa ain't gwine see you buried till he gets good and ready," he assured the immovable figure in the coffin. "I knows you ain't dead, but only tranced. I'se gwine to hold off the funeral till Doctor Carniel gets home. I ain't gwine take no new doctor's word. Set your mind to rest, papa'll turn them mourners back. Lorella, does you hear me, honey?"

If the girl heard she made no sign. The tall albino shook his head and crossing to the open door looked down the road. From the doorway he could see the sexton digging a grave among the scrub pines near the church. It was Lorella's grave. He laughed grimly.

But his interest was aroused. Closing the door and calling to Tiger to watch the cabin until his grandmother returned from an errand which had taken her to Comorn Hall, he shuffled out of his gate and along the dusty road to watch the digger at his work.

An hour later, as the time appointed for the funeral had almost come, and the friends and neighbors were assembling near the church and at his gate, Hamp made his way back to the cabin.

"You-all gwine on away," he called to the loiterers. "There ain't gwine be no burying here."

Still considering how he could best delay the funeral, he entered the cabin.

"Deed they seem mighty anxious to get the burying over," he muttered to himself. "But the grave doan' get my little Lorella till her time's come, an' it ain't come yet. No, sir, it ain't come yet."

As he spoke Old Henrietta, imperiously waving back the loungers, thrust the door open. Panic was in her aspect, fear was in her heart.

"Shut that do' an' keep them niggers out!" she panted as she crossed the threshold. "They's warranted us. Young Joe Macie brought the word to Hortense. They done 'spicioned us of robbing Miss Jinny in Baltimo'!"

"They has 'spicioned us?" Hamp repeated, aghast and trembling.

"They traced us on the boat, an' they tracked us in the town. They been a-questioning an' a-prying, an' they's learned a heap more'n it's good for them to know. We got to say Julius give us them hundred-dollar bills we changed in Baltimo'. There ain't no danger if we tells the same story, none unless they lays their hands on them bills we couldn't spend. The sheriff's coming an' like as not they'll search the place. We got to hide that money. It ain't safe in the chimney. That's the firstus place they'll look. Reach up an' get it out."

"Where'd we better put it then?" Hamp asked as he drew a sooty fruit jar from behind the chimney breast.

With trembling hands Old Hetty took the jar and unscrewed the rusty top. There were the five one-thousand-dollar bills, which they had never tried to change fearing to arouse suspicion, dry and safe. Satisfied, she returned them to the jar.

"Now, then," she said, "slip out the back way an' get the spade an' bury it. I'll call them fool niggers in to look their las' on Lorella's corpse so's they won't notice nothing."

A sound of approaching wheels, of voices at the gate, caused

her to pause and hurry to the window. The sheriff's buggy was drawn up at the roadside. The sheriff and his deputy were already advancing along the path.

"They're here! They're here!" she cried. "Lord God, be quick or we'll end our days behind prison bars."

She turned to thrust the ill-gotten treasure into Hamp's hands. But Hamp was gone. For an instant she quailed and faltered. A glance from the window told her flight was impossible. Then, moved by a sudden inspiration, she glided to the coffin and hid the fruit jar beneath the pillow which supported Lorella's head.

"Some of them niggers might grab her round the neck an' feel what's there," she muttered. By a supreme effort she lifted the heavy coffin lid and placed it in the coffin.

The next moment the door was pushed open; beyond the sheriff and his men could be seen the bolder spirits among the negroes.

Old Hetty faced the invaders without flinching.

"I knows what's brought you-all," she cried contemptuously. "You-all's come to try to put a crime that ain't ours off on me and on my son. But you needn't come a-seeking an' a-searching for what you won't find. There ain't no money here to pay off the mortgage on no white man's house an' home. But 'rest me! 'Rest me! Come on an' 'rest me. Come on an' search the house of bereavement that's got God's hand a-resting onto it in trouble and in tribulation. Come on an' search the house while they're a-carrying Lorella to her grave."

"This ain't no time, gentlemen, to come a-warranting an' a-searching," the Reverend Mably protested. "Sister Brent's got her hands full with a corpse in the house. It ain't helping nobody to insult the dead."

An answering murmur came from the negroes crowded about the open door. The sheriff and his men held a whispered consultation.

"I've got a warrant for you, Hetty," the sheriff said at last. "Hamp seems to have given us the slip, but we're pretty sure to get him before he's gone far. I'm going to leave a man

to watch the house till the funeral is over. Then we'll have a look about and maybe I'll take you up to the court-house. If I'd known Lorella was really dead I'd have put off my visit till to-morrow."

As he spoke he crossed and looked down through the oblong glass upon Lorella's upturned face.

"Here, some of you, lift off the lid," he said. "Let me examine her. How do you know this isn't just another of her trances?"

But Old Henrietta waved him back.

"You keep your touch off her," she cried. "Doan' you lay hands on her. Doctor Bibby he give Hamp her death papers two days ago. You-all can 'rest me, you-all can dig the dirt under this floor an' pull this shanty down, but you-all won't find what you-all came a-seeking 'cause it won't be here. Come on, brothers, an' lay this weary sufferer away. Come on, sisters, an' look your las' on a face you'll never see again till the morning of the Judgment Day. She's gone to glory. Yes, God, she's gone. She's gone."

A wail of lamentation rose from the negroes.

"Yes, yes, she's gone. She's gone to glory."

One by one they advanced and passing around the coffin gazed at the silent face, moaning or weeping or ejaculating some half sentence of a prayer.

"Oh, God in Heaven."

"She's gone home. Yes, Lord, she's gone home."

"The angels called her an' she had to go."

"There ain't no use to hang back when the summons comes."

"No, no, there ain't no use."

"Bless God, her hand's in His'n."

"Yes, Lord, she's found her rest in Jesus."

"We won't see Lorella Williams no mo' till the morning of the Judgment Day."

"Oh, but that'll be a bright day, brothers; oh, but that'll be a bright day, sisters."

"We'll all get up soon on the morning of the Judgment Day."

Slowly an ordered chant was taken up.

The coffin lid was fastened down. The coffin was lifted by the pall bearers, and borne out of the cabin door and along the dusty road to the log church, where it was carried up the single aisle to rest on trestles before the preacher's platform.

At the conclusion of the service the coffin was carried out and lowered into the new-made grave. The grave was filled in. The oyster can and the salmon can and the broken tumbler were sunk in the soft mold and filled with the artificial roses and forget-me-nots. Lorella was staring up at blackness now, buried at last, and in the coffin with her was the glass jar with the five one-thousand-dollar bills.

As the friends and mourners left the graveyard Sister Mably, waddling through the dust at the side of Aunt Rachel Jackson, who had come for the double purpose of attending Lorella's funeral and rejoicing with her daughter, shook her head with every outward sign of deep mental perturbation.

"Deed, Sister Jackson," she began at last, unable any longer to bear her load alone, "'deed I wouldn't be in Mignonette's shoes for nothing in this world."

"'Deed I wouldn't neither," said Jasemine Mamie, at her mother's elbow.

"Why wouldn't you be in Mignonette's shoes, Sister Mably?" Aunt Rachel asked, scenting calamity with a suspicious sniff.

"Why wouldn't I be in Mignonette's shoes?" Sister Mably repeated. "Ain't Lorella Williams' corpse got Mignonette's waist onto her back this very minute?"

"What's that waist got to do with it?" Aunt Rachel demanded uneasily.

"Where's the skirt that's made out of the same piece of goods, that's what I asks you, Sister Jackson?"

"The skirt? Why, Mignonette she ain't wore it but twice. What's the skirt got to do with it, Sister Mably?" Aunt Rachel was becoming anxious.

"'Deed down in old Charles City County where I was riz any child could tell you what that skirt's got to do with that

waist, an' what they both got to do with Mignonette. If you goes an' buries a corpse in a part of a live person's dress, the part that's in the grave will keep a-calling and a-calling for the part that's walking round in the open air till it draws the one that wore it into the graveyard too. The skirt'll keep a-yearning for the waist, an' the waist'll keep a-yearning for the skirt, an' Mignonette'll fade away like she was a lily gathered from the stem."

"It is the truth indeed," said Jasemine Mamie.

"Mignonette's as good as buried now if you don't get that waist off that corpse. 'Deed it's the Lord's truth I'se telling you."

"It is the truth indeed," echoed Jasemine Mamie. "That waist ain't never goin' to stop a-calling an' a-calling, an' a-drawing an' a-drawing till it's drawn Mignonette down to her las' home. 'Deed it won't."

"Well, I declare, I wish you'd spoke sooner, or not spoke at all," groaned Aunt Rachel. "All I hope is that Mignonette won't never come to hear of it. She's so tender in her feelings 'deed I reckon it would set her crazy."

Sister Mably's superstitious fears were soon on every tongue and Mignonette was regarded as one already marked by death. The whisper of it came to Mignonette. But though she shuddered, she expressed no wish to have the body exhumed and the waist removed.

"How do I know but what she'll come to life if we goes an' digs her up?" she asked her mother. "If the sheriff hadn't run old Hamp into the woods we wouldn't of got her buried yet. I don't reckon she's going to bother Rance an' me none if we let her alone. She's in a bed now where she can't kick the covers off summer nor winter."

It was late the next day when Doctor Carniel returned from Lancaster. When he heard that Lorella had been buried he looked startled but said nothing.

Before the week was out Hamp stole back and the sheriff served his warrants. But neither the albino nor his mother could be directly connected with the theft. Hamp, coached

by Old Hetty, told a straight story and clung to it tenaciously. So both were soon discharged from custody, and life for them resumed its even tenor in the little cabin near Comorn Old Gate.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE INTRUDER

In the exciting days which followed the death of Polly Beckford, John Brent found himself apparently restored to his old place in the community.

Judge Beckford, anxious to be of service, had given him the freedom of his office at the court-house. For years the judge had rarely visited the place. Here John came and went at will. He was more eager now than ever to carry on his study of the law. The law was to be his weapon against the Macies when his time should come.

Soon after his return to Virginia, he had assembled a gang of choppers and found congenial and profitable occupation in clearing tracts of timber land and in marketing the wood. Wise in his management of those in his employ and scrupulously exact in all his dealings, it was not long before he had built up a creditable business. There were few people in Northmoreland County who did not wish him well. Doctor Carniel, stopping at the court-house some weeks after Doctor Brent's mortgage had brought matters to a crisis at Piccadilly, found John in the judge's office.

"Well," said the doctor as he settled himself comfortably in Judge Beckford's own armchair, "well, John, it looks to me as though you'd soon be on your feet. Everything looks promising at last."

John closed the heavy book he had been reading when the doctor entered.

"Everybody's been mighty good and kind," he said as he glanced about the dusty office. "Perhaps I've gained a little ground, perhaps I stand a little better than I did before I went

away. But I'm really no good on earth to myself nor to any one till I can turn those Macies out of Brentwood and make them own that I'm a white man."

Crossing to the open window he looked down upon the little green beneath and beyond to the quaint old court-house whose walls had echoed the wisdom of John Marshall and the eloquence of Patrick Henry in Virginia's Golden Age.

"Over there, in that old court-house, there's going to be a big fight some day, a fight for Brentwood and my name, a fight for everything! That's what I'm living for, that's what I'm working for, to fit myself for that day when it comes. I always liked the law; even when I was in Canada I kept up my reading. It's the weapon I've got to use to cut my way back to my place in the world." He left the window. "Already I'm planning the trial, picking my witnesses, and working out my points." He laughed. "Two years more should see me admitted to the bar, and it won't be long then till I begin my fight. I'm saving up already to pay the fees and costs. I tried the short cut once, took the law into my own hands; I'll never make that mistake again."

And so John, steady of purpose, cut ties and cord wood, and got out saw logs, and read his Blackstone, while from the shelter of Brentwood Miss Bessie and her husband took anxious and resentful note of his proceedings.

"That nigger studying law! It's perfectly disgraceful!" snapped Miss Bessie. "You don't suppose he'll ever really be admitted to the bar!"

The summer was well advanced before Brent returned to Comorn Hall.

The strain, humiliation and disillusionment which Mrs. Brent had undergone since coming to Virginia had so told upon her health that she was scarcely able to be about the house, and Hortense wrote that she feared a serious illness if her condition did not soon improve.

Brent did not come alone. Mamie Ann Dandridge, who now acted as his secretary, accompanied him. Wishing to avoid observation and possible hostility, he had secured a

tug in Washington for the journey down the river. It was nightfall when, with his companion, he reached the private landing at Comorn. His coming was unheralded even to his own household.

Ascending the hill in moody silence, he led the way into the house by the rear door. The sound of voices came from the dining-room. As he entered his wife and Hortense rose from the table.

"Julius!" cried Mrs. Brent and then paused, staring at the woman who had followed her husband into the room.

"Father!" cried Hortense, and then she too was silent.

"The ladies don't seem to remember me, Doctor," Mamie Ann said, a hint of ill-concealed defiance in her tone. "Maybe when I take my things off they'll know me better."

As she spoke she lifted her veil and advanced with a certain tossing of the head. It was not her intention to conciliate the women of Doctor Brent's household.

"Mrs. Dandridge has been acting as my private secretary since the formation of the League," Brent made haste to say. "She's very kindly consented to come down and help me with my correspondence while I'm here; that can't be neglected. I reckon you can give us some supper, Molly, can't you?" he added sharply as Mrs. Brent made no sign in recognition of her unwelcome guest.

This was Brent's homecoming.

It was not long before his presence became known throughout the neighborhood, and threats were uttered but time passed and he was not molested.

True, he no longer dared to show himself at the wharf, or at the Cross Roads, and rarely ventured beyond the boundaries of his own lands. He held no intercourse with the white men of Beverley's Neck except upon those rare occasions when Colonel Macie drove over from Brentwood to see him in regard to business.

It was on the first of these visits that the carpetbagger proposed to take over Brent's share in the *Rappahannock Oyster Shell*, and so prevent the great man's business relations with

the Honorable Gus Wyatt from becoming public. Brent agreeing, the transaction was concluded.

This was all the more necessary as the Honorable Gus had determined to seek the support of his fellow citizens at the polls in November, being a candidate for the office of commonwealth's attorney of Northmoreland County.

Obviously it was not to the editor's interest to have his connection with Doctor Brent bruited abroad at such a time. Nor was it to Colonel Macie's interest. The carpetbagger was little less eager for the election of the Honorable Gus than that gentleman himself. He viewed with apprehension John Brent's study of the law, and dreaded the hour when he should be admitted to the bar. He foresaw a legal battle for the possession of Brentwood, and was anxious to have so important a person as the commonwealth's attorney as his ally. Who could tell? The Honorable Gus might be on the bench itself before John Brent could force an issue and bring his case into court.

For the most part the great man passed the days in his library with Mamie Ann, dictating long letters to Banister and Nelson and to others whose cooperation he sought in establishing and strengthening the League of the Black Crusaders.

Soon after his return Brent spoke to his wife of his intention of raising money by mortgaging Comorn Hall to enable him to carry on his great financial undertaking. The property being in Mrs. Brent's name, her consent was, of course, necessary.

Mrs. Brent uttered no word of protest, and when the details had been arranged she signed the papers which Brent and Colonel Macie brought to her without question.

Immediately upon the conclusion of this transaction Brent forwarded the fifteen thousand dollars which he had secured to New York to swell the nucleus of the capital of the great bank which was to be.

Sometimes, in his more genial moods, he talked to his wife of the vast projects which filled his mind. Under the spell of his new ambitions he saw the world in its larger aspects.

His horizons were distant. He looked beyond all narrow boundaries and fixed his gaze upon the rim of things. He meant, he said, to play a great part yet.

Mrs. Brent went about the house silently, like a ghost of her former self. She found her only comfort in the fact that, for once, she and Hortense were in complete accord. Instinctively both wife and daughter realized that Brent's safety was at stake, that Mamie Ann represented not only a menace to his home and family but to the man himself.

Thoroughly aware of her doubtful footing in the house, and the bitter hostility she aroused, Mamie Ann sought to strengthen her position by paying court to Brent's mother, and by making friends with the more important negroes on the Neck.

She encouraged Fred Catchiniel, the young negro school-teacher, to "call," and she established a close intimacy with the Reverend Mably and his family, and was regular in her attendance at the negro church.

She had easily convinced Brent of the importance of cultivating an intimacy with the members of his own race. His strength, he knew, lay with them. Any hint of indifference might prove fatal to his ambitions. Therefore he made Mamie Ann's friends welcome, as guests and equals, in the stately drawing-rooms at Comorn.

Hortense more and more absented herself on long drives with Joe Macie. She would not meet the negroes on a plane of equality. When her father protested she talked defiantly of going to Burnt Quarter as Joe Macie's housekeeper. The mere mention of such a possibility infuriated Brent. A coldness ensued between father and daughter of which the usurper was quick to take advantage.

Wishing to avoid an open breach with her husband, Mrs. Brent effaced herself as far as possible. On the occasions when her husband's secretary entertained her friends she shut herself in her room, keeping Celia with her. But Mamie Ann was not satisfied. The more Mrs. Brent withdrew the more she advanced. She was bent upon a struggle for su-

premacy with the silent white woman who moved, cold, aloof and disapproving, through the daily life at Comorn. But her challenges went unnoticed.

She grew bolder and sought to detach Celia from her mother, taking infinite pains to win the child. This course had its immediate effect. When Mrs. Brent perceived Mamie Ann's intention her barriers of silence and reserve were shaken. She appealed to her husband to send the woman away. Brent argued and defended himself, but he did not refuse. For a day or two Mrs. Brent hoped, then it became evident that her appeal was to be without effect. The woman still remained.

One Sunday Mrs. Brent had shut herself in her room with Celia. Mamie Ann, she knew, was expecting Fred Catchiniel and his friends. Hortense had not yet left Comorn for her afternoon drive with Joe Macie. She could hear her moving in the room across the narrow corridor. Mrs. Brent tried to fix her attention upon the book she was reading to Celia, but a morbid fear possessed her. She felt she was succumbing to a situation which was intolerable. A dreadful apathy was creeping over her. She realized the whole horror of her situation, and realized still more clearly her utter powerlessness to change it.

There was a knock on the door and Jasemine Mamie called:

"Miss Mamie wants Miss Celia to come down and see the company."

"Say that Celia is with me," Mrs. Brent replied.

The girl retreated, muttering to herself. Presently Mrs. Brent heard the girl's steps on the stairs again, ascending.

"Miss Mamie says 'deed they can't excuse Miss Celia. Her papa says she's to come down right away."

"Tell Doctor Brent I'm very sorry, but Miss Celia is busy with her books and can't come down-stairs this afternoon."

"Nobody ain't going to hurt her," urged the girl. "You better let her come. 'Deed they won't 'scuse her."

"They must excuse her," Mrs. Brent called sternly. "She can't go down to-day."

"Her papa's coming up now," the girl answered. "I reckon you better settle it between you."

She shuffled off as Brent's heavy tread was heard upon the stairs. In a moment the door was opened and Brent entered, his face flushed and lowering.

"She's my daughter as much as she's yours," he said angrily. "I want her to come down-stairs. It's time she began to see company. These young men have come to call. You can't treat them this way."

"Go down-stairs, Celia, since your father wishes it," Mrs. Brent said, rising.

"That's better," Brent answered, turning to follow Celia from the room. "I thought I could bring you to your senses."

"Wait," said Mrs. Brent, "I want to speak to you."

"I've no time now."

But she had moved before him, and closing the door, stood facing him.

"Julius," she said in a voice which trembled strangely, "Julius, will you send that woman away before it is too late? Answer me, Julius."

She was unmindful of his anger now.

"Don't raise your voice so. I can hear you," he growled. "Perhaps you want those ladies and gentlemen down-stairs to hear what you have to say?"

"Ladies and gentlemen," she scoffed in sudden wild disregard of consequences, "those ignorant wretches, those low wicked people!"

"They're your equals and Celia's."

"I deny it."

"I'd rather see her grow up to marry one of them than have her marry some damned white man!" he cried in sudden fury.

"I'd rather see her dead in her grave! I will see her dead before it shall happen."

"What do you mean?" he asked, moving toward her threateningly. "You'd better take care how you talk to me. Your child has my blood in her veins, and you knew what I was when you married me. You knew, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't know," she answered steadily. "I knew you weren't a white man. Do you suppose if I had really known just what you were that any power on earth could ever have made me marry you?"

"Don't you say this sort of thing to me. Do you hear me? You can't insult me and threaten what you'll do to my child. I'll have you locked up in your room if you talk this way. Turn round here; look me in the face. Are you losing your mind?"

"No. I wish I could. It would be easier. I wouldn't be thinking of what has happened already. I'd be blameless then for the death of that innocent girl you and your son deceived, and drove to suicide. If I were mad I would not have lost my last vestige of delusion, the last little remnant of belief in you and in your race, which made my life endurable. When you let your own son betray that girl to her death, while you tried to deceive me and to deceive yourself, and said it was for the sake of your race and not for your own insane ambition, your own vanity, I lost all hope. I despise you and I despise your race. If your race is to be saved by such means I say it is not worth the sacrifice. I won't trust Celia to that woman, nor to you, and I warn you if she stays here another day you and not I must be answerable for the consequences."

"You let her alone."

"Not any longer. Not a day longer. My patience has come to an end. Will you send her away?"

"No, I won't. This is my house and she shan't go."

"Then I shall, and Celia shall go with me."

"You'll go! You'll take Celia!"

"Yes, now. To-night, to-night, do you hear me?"

"You dare to try it," he threatened her with his uplifted hand. "You shan't leave this house! I'll lock you in this room. Hold on, don't you resist me. You can't leave this room till your senses come back. You shan't, I tell you!"

She struggled to escape. He dragged her back from the door, and held her thrust against the wall near the fireplace.

"Let me go," she panted. "Let me go! Celia! Celia!" She raised her voice to a piercing scream. "Celia!"

"Be still, be still," he cried, shaking her roughly.

"Don't you raise your hand against me. Don't you dare! Remember I'm white, you cowardly nigger!"

At the awful word he struck her blindly: struck her again. She sank from his grasp to the hearth, her head striking an andiron as she fell. She lay motionless. He stared down upon her. Blood began to trickle through her hair, staining her forehead and her cheek. He stood above her with the desire to maim and kill filling his eyes. The beast in him moved him to strike the prostrate form with his foot. Hearing Celia's step on the stairs he went to the door and locked it.

"Mama, mama!" called the child, trying to open the door. "Didn't you call me? What is it, what is it?"

"Don't worry. It's nothing at all," Brent answered. "You send your sister Hortense here and then run on down-stairs. Mama has just had a fainting spell."

The child vainly tried the door again, and then ran swiftly away to summon her sister.

Brent leaned above his wife. His rage had spent itself, a great anxiety possessed him. What if she were dead? He felt her heart and the physician reassured the man. She was only stunned by his blow and by the fall. Lifting and placing her upon the bed he poured water into a basin, and bathed the trickle of blood from her cheek. He noticed how deeply streaked with gray her brown hair had become.

Hortense knocked at the door.

"Are you alone, Hortense? I don't want any one but you."

"There is no one with me," Hortense answered.

Satisfied, he crossed and unlocked the door.

"Come in," he said. "Mother has had a bad fall."

Hortense took the towel from her father's hand and bathed Mrs. Brent's face. She asked no questions.

Brent left the room; hurrying to the floor below, he entered the library and hastily ransacked his neglected medicine case for restoratives.

"Don't come up," he said to Mamie Ann who would have followed him. "I don't need any one. Don't stop me now." His tone rang with an angry authority which checked the woman, and she returned, curious and indignant, to her friends in the drawing-room.

He found Mrs. Brent sufficiently recovered to be sitting on the edge of the bed. The blood still trickled from her hair. As Brent entered she lifted her hand and pushed the hair back from her face. Her hand was bloody. She looked at it, then touched her cheek with the open palm. The palm too bore a crimson stain. As Brent went toward her she shuddered and shrank back.

In his absence Celia had found her way to her mother. The child was weeping bitterly.

"Take Celia down-stairs," he said to Hortense. "No, take her to your own room and keep her there. I want to speak to her mother."

After his daughters had gone and the door was closed he turned to his wife again.

"I'm sorry. Molly, forgive me. I didn't know what I was doing, and what you said drove me mad. I'm worried sick, and I've been drinking more than is good for me. Say you forgive me."

"For the blow?" she asked.

"Yes! There's nothing else. I'll send her away."

"I forgive you for the blow," she said.

He came nearer.

"Can't we ever be friends again, Molly?" he asked.

"Never here," she answered. "Never here."

"Not if she goes away and everything comes out all right again?"

"It will never come out right here. Never. It is useless to hope it. If you will go back to Canada I will go with you, and we can try again. But it's of no use to try here. It is of no use, Julius. I knew from the day you first came that we were doomed, all of us, if we stayed on here. I didn't think the end

would come so quickly then, now I wonder that it has been so long."

"Let's talk it all over," he said, and sat down on the bed beside her, taking her hand in his.

They talked far into the night and Brent made promises and plans and resolutions which might have proved his salvation had they prevailed beyond the night itself. He even went so far, under the spur of his contrition, as to tell Mamie Ann that she must return to New York. But the woman only laughed at him. She would not go, she said, till he was ready to accompany her. Then he told his wife that she would go in a few days. He even set a date, but the day came and passed, and Mamie Ann remained at Comorn.

Mrs. Brent soon learned that the intruder had won in the bitter struggle for supremacy. She knew her every movement was watched lest she attempt to leave the place with Celia as she had threatened. Her jewels were taken from her to be locked in her husband's safe on the pretext that she was careless with them and they might be stolen. Mamie Ann had warned him not to leave her with the means of flight.

Hortense was always absent now. She was much in Washington and Baltimore, and often in New York. Joe Macie was usually absent at such times; scandal was busy with their names. But when she was at Comorn Hortense saw many things and saw them clearly. She had a certain reckless courage of speech which her father feared, and he was glad to give her money freely and so secure her absence.

"You'd better watch Celia while I'm gone," she said to Mrs. Brent one morning as she tied on her veil. "I'm going to Baltimore. I can't stay here with that woman in the house. Joe Macie's waiting down-stairs to drive me to the wharf, but I thought I ought to warn you about Celia. I've spoken to father, but it doesn't do any good. You are stronger now, and you'd better sit down-stairs and keep an eye on things."

"When are you coming back, Hortense?"

"I don't know, not while the money father gave me lasts."

I'd never come back if I could help it. I hate the place and everything about it. But I'll never be able to get away from it. I feel that. You may, and Celia may; but it's too late for me, too late."

"Too late," Mrs. Brent echoed, "too late, Hortense? Why should it be too late for you?"

"Well, it is. That's all." She paused, turned away and made a pretext of looking from the window.

Mrs. Brent saw the girl's breast heave quickly. She went to her and put her hand upon her shoulder.

"Tell me, Hortense," she whispered. "Tell me."

The girl wheeled with a choking laugh.

"There's nothing to tell. Only everything is wrong, and I've lost my chance. Polly Beckford paid with her life for father's great experiment, and I've paid, too." She paused. "I don't want Celia to pay. Celia is so young." She turned to Mrs. Brent almost fiercely. "You're her mother. They can't ruin Celia's life if you won't let them. You're white, you know it, and they know it, and they're afraid of you. You can save yourself, and you can save Celia." She paused again, lowering her voice, and came closer to Mrs. Brent. "Don't stay here," she whispered, "get away while you can. Get away and take Celia."

"But your father?"

"It's no use to think about father. It's no use to think about me. Think about Celia, and remember you're white." Suddenly she clung to the older woman, her arms about her, sobbing. "Oh, I wish I were white. Oh, God, how I wish I were all white, all white, all white. I haven't always liked you, but I've always known you were honest and decent and white." She tightened her arms about Mrs. Brent, straining her to her in a close embrace, and then ran from the room.

"Hortense! Hortense!" Mrs. Brent followed to the door. But the girl had run swiftly down the stairs and in a moment the wheels of Joe Macie's buggy crunched the gravel on the drive before the Hall and Hortense was gone.

The next day Mrs. Brent, looking from her window, saw

Fred Catchiniel and Celia in the box-walk. The negro had his arm about Celia's waist. As she looked Celia attempted to draw away, but the young man only drew her closer, and, unaware that he was seen, attempted to kiss the child.

"Celia!" Mrs. Brent cried. "Celia! come into the house at once." She left the window trembling with anger and descending the stairs passed swiftly to the porch which overlooked the garden. At the foot of the steps Catchiniel stood, still detaining Celia half by force.

"Let my daughter go this instant!" Mrs. Brent commanded. "Leave this place and never come here again."

The school-teacher only laughed and moved from one foot to the other.

"Now, don't you get vexed, Mrs. Brent, don't you get vexed," he urged in a conciliatory spirit. "Miss Celia ain't white. Why shouldn't I come to see her?"

"I am white," Celia insisted, stamping her foot. "You mustn't say I'm not. You've told me that before."

"Well, if you was white it ought to be all right for me to come to see you. I ain't a shade darker than your father, and he married a white lady, didn't he, Mrs. Brent?"

"Mr. Catchiniel has Doctor Brent's permission to call on Miss Celia," interposed Mamie Ann who had followed to the door. "I don't reckon you've got anything to say so long as her father's satisfied."

"Come, Celia," Mrs. Brent said, ignoring her husband's secretary. "I will speak to your father."

"Don't you push past me," the woman cried angrily. "Celia, you needn't go if you don't want to."

Mrs. Brent made no reply. She crossed the hall to the door of the library. Brent was seated at his desk as she entered.

"What is it, Molly?" he asked without looking up.

"Can I speak to you alone?" said Mrs. Brent.

"No, you can't," cried Mamie Ann, forcing her way into the room. "Why don't you say what you have to say now? You shan't take him up to your room and shut the door and talk him over to your side. I'm going to hear what's said. Yes, I

am. You can't push past me. Don't you try it. I hate you. Don't you dare to touch me or I'll tear the hair out of your head! I'll scratch your eyes out! I'll show you if you are white!" Her voice rose to a scream, and she sprang upon Mrs. Brent as though to attack her.

Rising quickly Brent released his wife and thrust the raving woman off.

"Let my wife go, you devil, let her go."

As he spoke he forced Mamie Ann toward the door. She resisted him and caught up a long, slender pair of scissors from the desk. Thus armed she turned upon Mrs. Brent. But Brent threw himself before his wife and wrenching the terrible weapon from her hands flung it into the fireplace.

"Go to your room," he thundered fiercely. "Go, and don't let me see you again to-day. I've had enough of you."

Awed by his anger Mamie Ann left the room, still threatening Mrs. Brent. When she had gone he turned sternly to his wife.

"Now you go to your room," he commanded. "Go, and I'll follow when I've seen her safe. This is a pretty sort of life, isn't it? It is a pretty sort of life."

Weak and trembling, Mrs. Brent crept from the room, and crouched and cowered upon the stairs, fearing her adversary might spring out of some doorway and assail her.

Brent looked after his wife with rising scorn. She felt his look, but she had no strength to turn and combat him. The very effort to mount the stairs taxed her to the utmost, and she clung to the heavy hand-rail for support. Even to appeal to her husband now seemed useless. She could scarcely count upon him for physical protection, and she trembled from actual dread. She told herself she was a white woman alone in the house of strangers, strangers of another race. Since the day he had struck her she had regarded Brent more and more as a person utterly unknown to her. In an instant she had seen all that civilization had done for the man whose wife she was fall away like a veil, and only the face of an Ethiopian savage remained.

The days which followed were days of torture. And always the sense of weakness and inertia grew upon her. A settled conviction was forming in her mind that she would never recover if she remained at Comorn Hall. It was a peculiarity of her weak and morbid state that it was only the thought of Celia that roused her to effort. But something grim and strong in her nature roused at the thought of her child. Celia should be saved. Celia should escape the curse of race and of environment. Celia should not become like Hortense. Neither should she be the victim of Mamie Ann.

In escape lay the only hope for her child, or for herself. Upon escape therefore she fixed her strangely flickering will. She dwelt upon it until the idea became an obsession, and a feverish mania to accomplish it replaced her wavering irresolution.

Autumn came and Celia was sent to a private school for negro children of the better class in Washington. The first snow whitened the earth and Mrs. Brent was still a prisoner. Once she slipped from the house, unobserved as she thought, but Mamie Ann seeing her from an upper window, divined her purpose and calling to Brent and his mother ran swiftly in pursuit.

It was during the days which followed this unsuccessful effort that Mrs. Brent came to realize that her weakness of mind and body was perhaps no longer due to her illness, but might be the result of some drug which Mamie Ann was cautiously and secretly administering to her. If her fears were justified she realized that she must act without delay. Her first impulse was to confide her horrible suspicion to her husband. But she resisted the impulse. If she made such a charge she would be in the utmost danger unless she acted with courage and decision. In the end she told him nothing, resolving to keep her own counsel and to escape at the first opportunity.

Spurred on by this new dread she cast about for means to aid her flight; without money she could accomplish little. She was aware that her husband had given Mamie Ann large

sums, and she had no doubt that her own jewels were in her possession. By cautious watching she discovered that the woman kept whatever valuables she had locked in her trunk, the key of which she always carried with her.

Brent had been absent for a few days in Baltimore attending to matters connected with the League. Emboldened by his seeming security from molestation, he had decided to return by the regular steamer, and had written Mamie Ann to have the victoria sent to meet him.

When the glittering equipage was driven to the door the ex-postmistress of Weyanoke was seized with an irresistible desire to flaunt herself at the landing. Calling to Old Henrietta to keep a strict watch upon Mrs. Brent while she was gone, she hurried to her room for her hat and coat.

"'Deed, Miss Mamie, doan' you go leaving me alone in the house with that white woman," the old negress grumbled. "Jasemine she's gone over to Sister Mably's an' the dear knows when she'll be back, an' the men is all out in the fields."

But Mamie Ann only laughed.

"If she's taken her coffee this morning I don't reckon she'll bother you much," she said as she left the house.

When Mrs. Brent, looking from her window, saw Mamie Ann drive away she knew her chance had come at last. Opening her door she crept silently down the stairs. Old Henrietta had returned to the kitchen. Passing around the house Mrs. Brent secured an ax from the wood-pile, and thus armed made her way swiftly to the usurper's room. A few sharp blows and the lock of the trunk was broken. Searching feverishly she found a bag in the bottom of the trunk; it contained a roll of bills, and the jewels which Brent had given the woman; many of her own were among them. As she secreted the money and the jewels in her bosom she heard Old Hetty ascending the stairs.

"What you doing in Miss Mamie's room?" the old woman demanded threateningly as she paused in the doorway. "What business you got to meddle with Miss Mamie's trunk? You done broke it open with the ax, is you?"

"Yes," Mrs. Brent answered. "I have broken it open." She spoke calmly, but her heart was beating so that she could scarcely breathe.

"You ain't so weak as you made believe you was," Old Hetty said suspiciously. "You better look out she don't bust your head open when she gets back from the landing. You listen to me an' put everything right back where you found it or there won't be no peace in this house to-night."

"I have been searching for what belongs to me," Mrs. Brent answered, deliberately rising from her knees.

"You go 'long out of here an' let me put them things back before she comes home or you'll pay for this," Old Hetty urged. She pushed Mrs. Brent away roughly and knelt down to examine the trunk.

"You done busted the lock off sure enough," she muttered. "Miss Mamie'll see it the first thing when she comes in the room an' she'll be blood mad, I reckon; yes, I reckon she'll be blood mad."

She turned. But Mrs. Brent was gone. The door was being closed softly from without. With a cry the old negress sprang to her feet. As she did so she heard the key turn sharply in the lock.

She flung herself violently against the door. She shook it, and tried to wrench it open. But it resisted all her efforts. She turned to find the ax. It was gone. Running to the dormer window she looked out. No one was visible. She called aloud, but there was no response. Made desperate by her anxiety, she placed a chair before the window and clambering out upon the roof made her way, with no small peril, to the next window. Once within she hurried down the stairs. No one was in sight from either door of the great hall.

Leaving the house to care for itself, Old Hetty struck off toward Hamp's cabin, hoping to overtake the fugitive if she had gone that way. But she saw no one. At a bend in the road the glittering victoria came in sight. Out of breath and exhausted by her haste, she paused on the roadside and waited until the carriage approached.

Seeing her the boy on the box stopped the horses.

Brent leaned forward. But his mother did not wait for him to speak.

"She's gone," she cried. "Your wife's done gone and run away and she ain't lef' no tracks behind her."

"Gone!" echoed Brent. "Gone! Don't talk such foolishness to me. What makes you think she's gone?"

His lowering face grew gray as he listened to the story of his wife's escape.

"We've got to find her," he said at last. "We've got to find her and bring her home, and we've got to treat her better."

But he gave no order to the boy on the box either to go on or to turn back. He only stared ahead.

"Treat her better," screamed the mulatto at his side. "Yes, I'll treat her better. She'll know it when I lay my hands on her white skin. I'll mark her! She's stolen my money and my diamonds! I'll track her with bloodhounds. Yes, I will! I'll track her like she was a nigger. I'll hunt her down. I'll teach her to go near a colored lady's trunk. She's a thief, that's what she is. She's a thief. Who's got bloodhounds? I want bloodhounds. If you don't track her I will. I'll teach her to steal from me. I'll hunt her out. I'll drag her down. I'll teach her her place. She ain't fit to live. She'll tie my shoes yet. She—"

"Get out of here," cried Brent, thrusting Mamie Ann roughly from the carriage. "Get out of here. If I hadn't brought you into the house she'd never have left it. It's your doings. Don't you call my wife a thief! If you ever lift your hand against her I'll kill you. You are not fit to breathe her name. Don't you ever let me see you inside my house. I'll do you harm if you ever come near me again. Drive on," he cried to the boy on the box, and the glittering victoria rolled on toward Comorn Hall, leaving the two women standing amazed and speechless in the roadway.

When the younger woman regained her speech it was to heap oaths and vile maledictions upon the figure in the re-

treating victoria, upon his white wife, and upon the white and black races in general.

Then she set off to follow on foot to Comorn Hall.

Old Henrietta remained behind at Hamp's cabin.

"Let them fight it out themselves," she muttered, looking after the younger woman who was plodding down the dusty road. A fatalistic feeling came over her. "Bloodhounds won't bring that white woman back to Julius's house," she mumbled to herself. "She's gone an' it ain't no use to try to bring her back. There's a heap of harm that can be mended, but they is some things if they breaks they breaks."

CHAPTER XLIV

FRIENDS IN NEED

That same evening as supper was placed upon the table Doctor Brent's return and the brazen appearance of Mamie Ann in the victoria furnished a topic of conversation in the humble home of Murphy Bird. Grandpa Bird was an attentive listener.

"Oh, my, oh, me, oh, me, oh, my!" said the patriarch rapidly at the conclusion of Mrs. Bird's narrative, for it was that lady herself, who, returning from a visit to her sister at the Cross Roads, had brought the news. "Ain't it awful? It certainly is. I reckon so. I reckon so." Having relieved himself of his mental stress, Grandpa Bird lapsed into silence and regarded the bright flame imprisoned in the chimney of the lamp which shed its luster on the supper table with a particularly malevolent and undivided attention.

"Some one," said Mr. Bird with unusual decision, "some one ought to have took the time and cursed him out. A body that'll carry on like what he done should have been took and cursed out. Yes, sir, he ought to of ketched hell till he knowed he was a-living into a Christian country like what this is."

"Well, supper's spread an' you might as well draw up," said Mrs. Bird.

"I got my mouth set for a taste of smoked hog meat an' a boiled potato," Grandpa Bird admitted as he drew his chair to the table.

For a time the conversation lagged, then the patriarch said:

"I declare it eats well, it certainly does. There's substance into hit, and there's a flavor into hit, an' the wind's made my appetite as sharp as a razor, I declare it has."

"Pass me another slab of pie, pap. I ain't full yet," Salvadorie said at last.

"No, sir," his father answered, summoning the entire moral force of his nature to meet the crisis. "No, sir, you needn't ask me to pass you no more pie. Give it the go-by, son, or it'll take an' tie a bowknot into your gizzard like what I got in mine. Shoeleather pie-crust can lay a body out quicker'n an undertaker, for it knows its business better. You can have another helping of the hog meat and potatoes an' it'll do you a heap more good."

But Salvadorie had possessed himself of the pie unaided by his parent, and further argument was futile.

"Well, I declare," said Grandpa Bird. "I do declare! He's as wild as a buck, ain't he? But I reckon while niggers acts like what they do, we can't expect no better behavior out of our children. What's the world a-comin' to!"

"Things ain't a-going to go on forever, grandpap, like what they've been a-going," said his son. "There ain't no call for white folks to take no more off the niggers than what they want to take. There's a day of settlement a-coming as sure as I'm a-setting here; an' she will be a big day when she comes."

"Mebby so, mebbly so," Grandpa Bird admitted, cocking his head up on one side like a suspicious old bluejay and eying his son impersonally, "mebbly so. But just you bear this into your mind, Murphy. There is a heap of things that won't be settled till the Judgment Day, an' this here nigger question looks to me like it was one of them. Mebbly there is a big day a-coming, but it ain't as big as what the Judgment Day's a-going to be. You ain't no cause to intermeddle into the Lord's work. He ain't a-waiting on you for to name the day, nor for to set the hour. Leave matters lay where they is, an' fix your hope onto the Judgment Day. I reckon there'll be plenty of hell-fire left for to go round."

"There'll be a heap of hell-fire needed, I'm a-thinking, if some folks is to get their just deserts." Pushing back his chair as he spoke, Mr. Bird rose from the table and crossing to the door opened it and looked out upon the early night.

"Well, sir," he said after a careful survey of the glittering heavens where the constellations hung like a myriad of celestial fireflies, "well, sir, she's blowed up clear, but she's blowed up cold." He paused and listened.

"What is it, Murphy?" asked his wife.

"I ain't sure—but it seems to me there's something moving over there beyond the hog lot."

"It's Bertha, mebby, broke loose from the barn," Mrs. Bird suggested, going to her husband's side and peering into the darkness.

"Mebby so, I wouldn't put it past her," Mr. Bird assented. They listened a moment. "If it was Bertha," began Mr. Bird, but Grandpa Bird cut him short.

"You've been a-complaining round all day, an' now you stand the door open and forgit my rheumatism. The night air just sets me crazy. If I complained like I've heard some folks do I reckon you'd know better than to set the door open onto my spine."

Deeply aggrieved, Murphy closed the door.

"Complain," said he sadly, addressing the back of Grandpa Bird's head, "what's a body to do when he's got liver complaint like what I've got it but complain? What'd the doctors call it liver complaint for if you ain't to complain? It ain't a thing a body's going to feel proud about, nor it ain't a thing a body's going to make a secret of."

"I wish it was," snapped Grandpa Bird, quite out of temper, as he huddled over the stove.

Mr. Bird resumed his chair, accommodating himself as best he could to the person of Salvadorie, and helped himself to a chew of tobacco.

"I seen the picture of a stout lady into the *Rappahannock Oyster Shell* to the store to-day," he informed his unwilling listeners, "an' it told how she'd been a sufferer with liver complaint, an' it named her symptoms; yes, sir, an' when I laid my symptoms out an' said 'em over to Colonel Washington there wasn't a one that heavy-set lady got but what I had it worse. She wrote the grandest letter about how she'd suffered,

and how she'd fell away, an' then she said she'd took up her pen to say so for she didn't want a body that had a liver into them to suffer any more. She wanted them to set right down an' write to old Doctor Begg for a box of his old English Gooseberry Pills, an' put a post-office order for a dollar into the envelope an' get their health restored like she done."

He paused and listened.

"What you listening to now, Murphy?" asked Mrs. Bird, who had brought her sewing to the table, having put away the supper dishes. "I declare you give a body the fidgets. If it was Bertha—"

"Sh!" cautioned Mr. Bird, rising quietly. "It ain't Bertha. I seen a woman's face at the window."

As he spoke a hesitating knock sounded on the door.

Mr. Bird opened the door. The lamplight fell upon Mrs. Brent standing just beyond the threshold. It fell upon her bare head and on her haggard face. It fell upon her dragged skirt and on the thin left hand which clutched at something hidden in her breast.

"Good evening, ma'am," said Mr. Bird, his tone betraying not a trace of surprise, full only of friendly assurance, as he saw the look of strain and terror on her face. "Walk in, ma'am, walk right in, an' take a chair an' set down. Sadie," he called, "this is Mrs. Brent of Comorn. I reckon you better come here quick."

But Mrs. Bird was already at his side and now supported Mrs. Brent, who trembled and tottered as they assisted her to enter.

"I have been hiding in the swamp since sunset," she whispered as they led her to Grandpa Bird's warm place beside the stove. "I was afraid to come near enough to the house to see who lived here until dark. I was in the field when you came to the door a little while ago, and then I came closer and looked in through the window. I didn't dare to knock until I knew this was a white man's house. I have left Comorn Hall forever."

Ten minutes later Murphy Bird was on his way across the

fields, following a footpath which led to Piccadilly. Half an hour later Colonel Washington, with Mr. Bird's assistance, was putting the colonel's horses before the ancestral carriage. Still an hour later, as Mr. Braxton sat reading in his study, he heard the noise of wheels before the rectory gate. A blur of voices preceded the sound of steps upon the gravel, and Mr. Braxton, lamp in hand, had almost reached the outer door when it was opened without ceremony and Colonel Washington entered, followed by Mrs. Brent and Murphy Bird. Mrs. Brent wrapped in a shawl of Mrs. Bird's and wearing a bonnet also loaned her by that lady, had, encouraged by Colonel Washington, in some degree recovered her composure. Yet the change in her appearance since Mr. Braxton had last seen her was so great that even the gossip which had spread over the neighborhood had not prepared him for it.

"Mrs. Brent!" he exclaimed. "Come into my study, madam. Come in."

"Are you alone?" asked Colonel Washington. "We've come on private business," he added significantly. "Mrs. Brent doesn't want to meet strangers to-night."

"There's no one here," Mr. Braxton assured him. "Mrs. Braxton's gone to bed, and Kittie's gone to spend the night with Mrs. Carniel. The doctor's been called away to Broken Banks for a consultation."

"I reckon I'd better wait outside while you gentlemen talk to the lady," Mr. Bird suggested from his place near the door. "I'll watch the horses, an' notice if anybody comes up the road from Comorn. I'll be right within call, Colonel, right within call."

"All right, Murphy," the colonel assented. "I don't reckon we'll be very long." Then he turned, a hand upon each knee, and faced the clergyman.

"Mrs. Brent has left Comorn Hall. She's never going back. She wants us to help her to get possession of her little daughter who's at school in Washington, and she wants us to help her to get out of the country. She's going to England, if she

can get there. She says she won't feel safe on this side of the ocean. There is every likelihood that she'll be followed. And there's very little chance that she can get possession of her daughter if Doctor Brent gets wind of what she intends. Mrs. Brent has money, and she has jewelry. It's enough, she thinks. What she needs is some one to go with her at least as far as Washington, and to help her if there's any trouble about her daughter. Mrs. Brent's been very sick. She needs a lady with her."

"That's plain," assented Mr. Braxton. "I don't reckon you and Mrs. Washington could go?"

"We could go," the colonel answered warmly, "and we will go if it's the best thing to do. But it would mean a loss of time. When Murphy Bird came for me I didn't understand the situation as I understand it now since I've seen and talked with Mrs. Brent. It would take time to send back to Piccadilly for Mrs. Washington, and time's the great thing if Mrs. Brent's to get possession of her little daughter. She's got to be in Washington to-morrow, and the best way to get her there is to drive across to Fredericksburg and take the first train north. It's better than trying to stop an up-river steamer; the wind is high and cold; the river might be rough. It's safer every way since we can't wait for the boat to-morrow."

"I'll call Mrs. Braxton," Mr. Braxton rose as he spoke, "and she can dress and pack the few things we shall need, and I reckon she can supply Mrs. Brent with a suitable bonnet and a cloak. The sooner we start the better," he added as he left the room.

"There are many things that I might tell you," Mrs. Brent said to Colonel Washington when they were alone, "many things it would be a relief for me to tell some one. But though I have left my husband's house, and though I shall probably never see him again, I can not forget the years before we came here, the years when he was such a different man. But it can do no harm for me to say that I did everything I could to save that poor young girl. I thought I had saved her, or I

should have written to Judge Beckford. That has been a weight on my conscience. It has preyed upon my husband, too. He never meant that it should go so far."

"People don't hold you responsible for that, ma'am. Nobody thinks you had any part in that, but they can't acquit your husband. He should go north, ma'am, or back to Canada. It was the greatest mistake in the world that he ever came here. A fatal mistake, a fatal mistake," the colonel repeated, staring in the fire. "I hope you save your daughter, ma'am, but there's nothing now that can help poor little Polly Beckford."

"I often think of her," the haggard woman said, "I know my husband often thinks of her. Until the news of her death reached us I still had hope that in some way we might escape the ruin I have seen before me ever since I first set foot inside of Comorn Hall. I have not hoped since then."

"There was Miss Constance, too," and Colonel Washington sighed heavily. "All that would not have happened if Doctor Brent had stayed where he belonged. And there's John Brent, turned out of Brentwood by a Yankee, his whole life ruined. That couldn't have happened if Doctor Brent had stayed in Canada. He's played into that rascal Macie's hands from the first day he came. Poor John, poor John!"

Mrs. Brent leaned forward. Steps were heard above passing toward the staircase. She spoke quickly.

"I have often heard my husband speak of Miss Constance and I am certain that once in speaking of the past he told me something of her marriage. But when I reminded him of it soon after we came to Virginia and asked him to do the young man justice he denied ever having told me such a thing and even hinted that the reports I had heard were true."

"You can't remember what he told you of Miss Constance—of her marriage?" the colonel asked eagerly.

"Nothing, only I have a strong impression that once he spoke to me of some incident relating to it. My husband's first wife would have known, of course. She may have known Miss Constance personally. But so many years

had passed when I was married to Doctor Brent that he spoke but little of those times, and much of the little he told me I forgot."

The steps were coming down the stairs.

"Before you leave this country, ma'am, will you write down just what you have said to me? It isn't evidence. It could have no value in a court of law—especially now that you have left your husband's house. But it would be a comfort sometimes to remember you had helped to lift a little of the cloud that hangs about Miss Constance's name."

"I will write it, and send it to you, but it must not be used against my husband."

"I give you my word, madam; it couldn't be used as legal evidence."

As she ceased speaking Mr. Braxton entered the study, followed by Mrs. Braxton. Mrs. Braxton wore her bonnet and a heavy coat. Mr. Braxton carried a small hand-bag filled with the essentials for a brief journey.

"We are ready as soon as Mrs. Braxton can see if she has any bonnets or coats which Mrs. Brent can wear."

The two women left the room together.

A little later Murphy Bird was guiding the colonel's horses along the dark road toward distant Fredericksburg. Mr. Braxton sat beside him, while Mrs. Braxton and Mrs. Brent occupied the seat behind them.

Colonel Washington remained at the rectory, where, after having telephoned to a friend living twenty miles beyond to be on the lookout for Mr. Braxton with fresh horses, he sat down in the rector's easy chair and pondered long before the fire. He thought with pity of the homeless woman whose flight he had assisted. He thought of her husband, as he had known him as a slave, and as he knew him now. He thought of Polly Beckford, and of the tragedy at Avalon, but chiefly he thought of Miss Constance, dying in exile in a cabin in the woods, and of her son, living to be sure, but dead to all he held most valuable in life. He thought of Ada, patient and brave and confident, and, being no longer young,

he fell sound asleep hoping that things might turn out better than they promised.

In Washington Mrs. Brent had no difficulty in finding Celia. She made a pretext of taking the child with her for a brief holiday, and so was able to secure her trunk. No word had preceded her of her flight from Comorn Hall.

With Mr. and Mrs. Braxton she visited a steamship office and secured passage on a steamer sailing from New York on the following day. She found she had sufficient money to pay her expenses to England. Once there she could sell her few jewels and begin life anew.

She was happy in the companionship of Celia. There was a wide world still, there still was hope, peace there might be, and quiet happiness perhaps, when once the ocean lay between her and Comorn Hall. Only in England would she feel safe, safe from pursuit, safe from the shadow of the awful problem with which her life had become entangled.

She promised to telegraph Mr. Braxton the morning that she sailed, and again to cable him upon arriving in England. These two messages were to be sent to her husband, that he might know his daughter was safe. After that, Mrs. Brent said, it was not probable that he would ever hear from her or from the child again.

Mr. and Mrs. Braxton went with them to the station.

"If there is ever anything you wish to know in regard to conditions at Comorn, or if there is ever any message you wish to send to Doctor Brent, write to me, and I will tell you what you wish to know, or I will see that your message reaches your husband," Mr. Braxton said at parting.

"Thank you, I might some time like him to know that his daughter is safe and happy. If it seems best I may send a message."

She thanked him again coldly but sincerely; she wept a little when Mrs. Braxton bade her good-by. Then as the good man and his wife left the car where they had seen her seated with Celia by her side, she drew her heavy veil low

over her face, and sat a stern and somber figure, clad all in black, beside the beautiful child who wore a rich red dress.

When Mr. and Mrs. Braxton returned to Weyanoke they found a telegram informing them the fugitives had sailed.

Mr. Braxton mentioned the lonely woman and the child in his prayers, and on the following Sunday, the choir never knew why, he gave out the hymn, *For Those in Peril on the Sea*.

About ten days after his return to the rectory Mr. Braxton received the first and only cable which had ever been addressed to him. It was telephoned from Fredericksburg and read as follows:

"Braxton. Weyanoke, via Fredericksburg, Virginia, America. Safe Gratitude."

Then, and not till then, did Mr. Braxton communicate, by letter, his intelligence to Doctor Brent of Comorn Hall.

CHAPTER XLV

THE GREAT MAN IN COLUMBUS

A period of heavy lethargy followed Brent's wild rage when he learned that Mrs. Brent had escaped to England.

There had been no pursuit. He had hoped that she might creep back at nightfall. When she did not return a cautious inquiry was made among the negroes to discover if any had seen her or knew her whereabouts. But the inquiry was fruitless. Mrs. Brent was safe in England before any whisper of her movements reached Comorn Hall.

Mamie Ann doggedly maintained her place in the household, but for days Brent refused to recognize her presence. At last his utter loneliness and desolation, for Hortense was still absent, together with his need of some one with whom he could speak freely of his affairs, broke down the barriers of silence, and the woman soon regained her ascendancy and even strengthened her hold upon him.

He had dark seasons of terrible depression, of keen remorse, and these were increased by his growing anxieties regarding money.

Stripped of almost all of his available resources, which had gone to lay the foundations of the League, Comorn was a constant drain upon him. The outlay was ceaseless and the returns so slight that they afforded him no material relief. To retrench would be to invite comment. He kept a bold front, but he was forced to admit to himself that it would be years before he could hope to make the place pay its own way.

He began to realize that while he had been born on the land, he was not a practical farmer. He had theories in abundance; but each seemed, when put into practise, more

expensive than the other. Hortense was a source of expense, and Mamie Ann was always obtaining large or small sums on one pretext or another. Even Eugene, to whom his father had confided the exact condition of his affairs before leaving New York, made thoughtless demands.

Ultimately, when the League was organized, Brent was confident there would be an end to his worries. But the present must be bridged.

Comorn oppressed him. In spite of the protests of Mamie Ann he had Hamp and his mother shut up the cabin and come and live in Comorn Hall. Tiger, too, was domiciled in a corner of the building. He tried to keep Hortense at home and maintain a semblance of family life. But his efforts met with little success. After the flight of Mrs. Brent, Hortense openly rebelled against Mamie Ann's presence, and to escape the conflict of wills he let her spend her time where she would, in Washington, in Baltimore, and in Canada, where she still had many friends.

At intervals his native buoyancy came to his aid, and the aspect of his affairs would appear hopeful. The League would soon make him the master of millions, the arbiter of the nation. His wife would repent her folly and would return with Celia.

At such times he would go about the house a jovial, genial presence, heavy of tread and leonine of aspect, his splendid shoulders rounded a little now as he leaned upon his cane, his great shock of grizzled hair more streaked with gray, but with a strange boyish charm and a wealth of vitality almost electrical, his smiling eyes veiling strange and vast ambitions.

If his hands could but seize as his mind could comprehend, he would grasp and occupy the highest places yet. He would hold the world's attention while he lived, and be perpetuated in bronze and marble and in history when he should die. His dreams, fantastic as they were, were like vague prophecies. The conqueror who remaps the world first leads his hosts in dreams. So Brent led his.

He permitted Banister and Nelson and Eugene and Adriance, in whose hands his vast plans were becoming even more vast, to dazzle him with their glowing reports of the spread and progress of the League until at last he was awakened from his mood of drifting to realize that their demands had brought him to the verge of bankruptcy. Substantial as his assets were, his liabilities would soon exceed them.

Convinced of the danger of his position he wrote at once to Banister and Nelson, telling them they must look to him for no more capital, while to Eugene and Adriance he wrote that the time had come for results. There must be an end to outlay.

In his dilemma Brent could think of but one way by which he might immediately relieve himself from the pressure of debt with which he was confronted. He wrote to the managers of the lecture bureau to know if they would undertake the direction of another tour, and asked a heavy guarantee.

He waited eagerly for the reply. He dreaded to open the letter when it came. The answer which he received was cold in tone. No guarantee would be considered. If Doctor Brent could secure a promise of the Haitian ministry, or any official recognition from Washington, it would have a tendency to clear away the bad impression which they felt compelled to remind him had been created at the time of Miss Beckford's death. If Doctor Brent decided to undertake the tour, they suggested Ohio, or some other of the middle states, as the best starting point. Bitterly disappointed, Brent's first impulse was to reject the proposal; in the end he accepted it. Anything was better than the inertia of Comorn.

Mamie Ann made ready to accompany him in the capacity of secretary, but he would not permit it. He felt her presence might arouse comment and affect public opinion unfavorably. After a stormy scene he drove away alone, and Mamie Ann prepared to rejoin her brother in New York. Comorn was to be left to the care of Hamp and Old Henrietta until Hortense returned from Canada.

In Washington Brent was cordially welcomed by Bishop

Comfort and such leaders of his race as happened to be in the city, but coldly received by the administration, which looked on him askance since the tragedy at Avalon.

The under-secretaries whom he saw gave him no encouragement in regard to Haiti. A minister was already slated for the post. The administration evidently had no intention of whitewashing Doctor Brent.

Before he left Washington to open his tour in Columbus, Ohio, Brent wrote to ask Mrs. Delafield if he might see her, and hinted of far-reaching plans.

The reply came the day before he was to leave. Mrs. Delafield wished Doctor Brent success, and might be pleased to see him if she chanced to be in Washington when he returned to the city. She regretted that her engagements prevented her from seeing him before he left town.

The formal tone of the note chilled him and struck at his courage at a moment when he needed it most. That evening the papers printed long accounts of the flight of Mrs. Brent. Every brutal detail had been ferreted out by a reporter who had been sent to Comorn to investigate the matter. With the story of Mrs. Brent's flight was retold the story of the tragic death of Polly Beckford.

"I don't like the sort of press work they're giving you, General," Bamford said, as they boarded the west-bound train. "If this story gets into the Columbus papers it isn't going to help business any."

"Don't you worry," Brent replied confidently. "I'm not going to." But his courage was a thing of words only.

As they drove from the station to the hotel in Columbus, Brent saw that several of his lithographs had been torn and defaced. They were the familiar ones which showed him standing before Comorn Hall with his white wife at his side. Bamford's quick eye also detected the mischief. But neither spoke of it.

As Bamford feared, the great man's coming had been heralded by the story of Mrs. Brent's flight, reprinted from the Washington papers, and by long accounts of the tragedy at

Avalon. Bamford no longer attempted to conceal his anxiety when the manager of the hall in which Brent was to speak told him he thought the lecture should be canceled or postponed.

But to this Brent would not hear. If the hall was closed against him he would sue the proprietor, he said.

Several prominent negroes, members of the League of Black Crusaders, offered to pack the hall with his adherents. But Brent, confident of his ability to sway any audience, rejected their offers. If there was hostility he would overcome it. The success of his tour depended on his courage. If he showed the white feather now he would be driven from the platform. They should not rout him without a battle.

Brent drove to the hall early. He was nearly mobbed as he left his carriage. But the police intervened. Many negroes were in the galleries, and police were scattered here and there and massed about the doors.

There was no distinguished white citizen to introduce him; no committee of clergymen and college professors sat upon the platform to lend him countenance. As he limped slowly to his place, sweeping the great audience with a fearless glance, the air was charged with excitement as though a storm was about to burst. But his bold front awakened a spirit of fair play.

"Gentlemen," he said impressively, as he paused beside the table in the center of the platform, "I believe it is important to you—and to your city, and to your state, and to your country—that you should hear what I have to say. You are, for the most part, absolutely ignorant of the conditions which confront you and which confront this nation. I am here to-night to speak to you plainly upon a subject which is, whether you now appreciate it or not, supremely vital to every man before me in this audience.

"Already one phase of the problem with which I shall attempt to deal has occasioned a great war—the Civil War. That war may be said to have closed the first phase of this question, for with it slavery terminated in the United States.

Statisticians will tell you how many battles were fought, how many lives were lost, how many homes were desolated, how many hundreds of millions were expended before a settlement of this first phase of a mighty problem could be reached.

"It is on this theme, which is of such great moment to us all, that I am here to speak." He paused as the last deep tone rolled over the crowded auditorium and waited till the stillness deepened. The native power of the man and his splendid voice compelled the attention of his hearers. He passed his strong bronzed hand through the thick masses of his grizzled hair, lifted his noble head more proudly and continued:

"Gentlemen, I am aware that in no small degree I am myself on trial to-night. You have come not so much to listen to me as an advocate of race equality as to pass judgment upon me as a man. I might take this occasion to enter into a defense of the course I have pursued, to explain my purposes, to justify my motives, to lay bare my private life. I might seek to arouse your sympathy, but I have no such intention. All such matters are of concern to me, and to the little circle of my friends, but they are utterly unimportant when compared to the great cause I represent. Gentlemen, I must repeat myself. I must ask you as I have asked others before if you understand, if you comprehend that the time is not far distant when there will be two nations within this republic? A white nation and a black nation? Can you comprehend what it will mean if these two nations are in essential conflict? I say to you, men of the North, as I have said to the men of the South, if you will not allow us our political rights in your nation, you will force us to become a separate nation. The negro wants not only what might perhaps be termed his substantial rights, but what I shall call his overhead rights as well. Already we are governed in the southern states by separate laws, framed, if not for our oppression, at least for our repression. The hated Jim Crow laws. I warn you! We shall raise anew the old cry of taxation without representation; and with far greater justice than when it

was raised by the American colonies and heralded the Revolution. Gentlemen, real freedom is not intended for us, and it never will be ours until we can compel it. What I am here to make you realize is that the day will come, is coming fast, when we can compel the freedom which is ours by right."

"Never!" cried a hoarse voice from the gallery. "If you talk fight we'll wipe you out so quick you won't know what's hit you. Yes, you and every damned nigger in the land!"

"No, you won't," Brent answered, planting himself upon the very edge of the platform, and pointing a menacing finger toward the speaker in the gallery. "No, you won't! We've heard that sort of talk too long. It's empty. Threats that are not backed by purpose do not carry far. Purpose, and all that purpose means, is with my people. Our cause is just, our cause is moral, and our cause will prevail. Oh, gentlemen, gentlemen, when will you learn that the two gifts the negro will no longer have from any man are insolence and patronage? What can contempt and scorn and scoffing profit you? We want you to know that only God's laws shall govern us, that only He shall limit our advance."

He paused and surveyed his audience. So far, he felt, he was holding his own against them. But a sense of anger was rising within him, a swelling arrogance. His will strained at its moorings; he felt a mad desire to disregard all caution, to reveal the terrible potentialities which lurked in the grim shadow of race hatred. He was fast losing his old dispassionate attitude which had been so convincing, and which had always before served to disarm his opponents and to win some measure of admiration from every one who came within the spell of his voice.

"It has been said," he began again, "that it would be a dangerous thing for me to speak here to-night. Is it because it is dangerous to speak the truth? Well, I must take the risk."

"We'd like to know what you've got to say about niggers marrying white folks?" asked the hoarse voice from the gallery.

"I might have a good deal to say on that subject," Brent answered. "I believe in the intermarriage of the races. I advocate it, and I'm not ashamed, and not afraid to say so. Don't you gentlemen agree with me that it would be a better thing for both races if the negro came by his white blood honorably? There is white blood in our veins, plenty of it, as everybody knows; some of it the best blood of the South. All I say is, since the races are to mix, let their relations be honorable. Let the woman who is to be the mother of a white man's child be that white man's wife. There is no answering that argument."

"Where's your own white wife?" bawled the husky voice from the gallery. "You have made a hell of a success of your marriage, ain't you? How do you know your wife ain't killed herself like the white girl you wanted your nigger son to marry?"

"I won't be questioned by an insolent ruffian!" thundered Brent. "Put that man out of this building if you want to hear what I have to say. I've not come to Columbus to defend myself, no, nor to defend my people. I'm here to show the white race a peril it's facing, the greatest peril the white men of this nation ever faced. You don't need to hear me if you don't want to. But don't in your arrogance underestimate the force of the race you have arrayed against you. For it is arrayed against you, solidly. We are already marshaling our forces for the coming strike. Since you will not accept us as your friends you may well fear us as your enemies. The time is coming when the old slave-holding South will be the seat of a mighty negro republic. Where the Confederate States once sought to build an empire on the brawn and sweat of the negro slave, the children of those slaves will rule as masters even as I am now master in the mansion where I was once a slave."

"We are no longer the servile people you think us. The shackles that were struck from our hands have fallen from our souls as well. Laugh if you will; I tell you that the work John Brown began is going on, and will go on, until

the white man acknowledges the negro as his equal. There can be no peace until that day comes. Our war is not declared; our weapons are not arms, but the gigantic struggle has begun—it will not cease till justice reigns throughout the world."

"To hell with the nigger!" cried a voice from the audience. "Get out, you coon!" echoed another. "Hi, there, nigger, what you doing in a split-tail coat?" A roar of hoots and jeers and hisses rose at him from the hostile crowd. But Brent stood firm.

"I am one man, standing here alone to preach the Black Crusade, the crusade of my race. I am one man alone, but mine is the voice of ten million Ethiopians upon this continent, the voice of two hundred millions of negroes throughout the world. I am the voice of the downtrodden, the oppressed races of the world, the voice of China and Japan, the voice of the nigger and the coolie and the chink! You can't laugh and hoot and jeer them down. No! But every laugh and hoot and jeer, and every mocking word and epithet is but a rivet that aids in uniting my race in a solid and invincible front against your race! To those who elect the rôle of tyrant shall be meted out the fate of the tyrant. I tell you that the peril of the oppressor is ever tenfold greater than the peril of the oppressed. Let us expand and grow in peace and happiness and you disarm us. Confine us within the bonds of special legislation and race discrimination, bind us with Jim Crow laws, and when you have heaped mountains of injustice upon us look to see my race arise with the power of the volcano and hurl back the load and overflow the land!"

Above the tumult his voice had still been heard. He was conscious of the flying pencils of the reporters beneath him in the first row. He knew that he was speaking for the last time to an audience of white men. He knew that he was forever parting company with the timid and conservative of his own race. He had done forever with compromises and half measures.

"Races have died as nations die." He was speaking again, dispassionately, as though pronouncing judgment in the last court of all appeal. "A time of decadence for the white race is at hand. You are no longer the invincible unconquerable advocates of principles who once carried your creeds and your flags to the uttermost ends of the earth, and who might neither be stayed nor turned back. You have been great, but you are great no longer. Singleness of purpose, and the will to move forward toward great goals, is now our heritage, not yours. The past was yours, the present you believe is yours, but my eyes are fixed on greater distances! I look toward further horizons. To the day when time shall make the things that are to be the things that are! Over the horizon of to-morrow and to-morrow lurk realities more grim than those of yesterday. I warn you! To-morrow the world may not be the same comfortable world the white man knows to-day. White supremacy, once a fact, to-day is an idea only, to-morrow it may be a memory. The idea of black supremacy may yet supplant it. It is probable that the white race will never again be absolute in its control of this continent. The struggle of the races to possess it has begun. The partition of the Western Hemisphere is already under way. The nigger and the Jap, the coolie and the chink are already knocking at your gates. You white Americans, you money-changers, pleasure-seekers, shallow opportunists, you are rotting as the Romans rotted to their doom!"

As he paused the tumult was deafening; men hurled missiles and shameful things upon him. He was bespattered by foul substances, a great shout of derision shook the theater, but he stood his ground.

"If we had you down South we'd take and burn you for less'n this," cried the hoarse voice from above.

Slowly Brent lifted his great head till his eyes were fixed upon the speaker in the gallery. Slowly his great shoulders rose in a deep breath. He extended his hand to silence the tumult that he might be heard. A saturnine smile played upon his bronzed face, and vanished. For a moment more,

before he loosed the whirlwind, he would hold them in the hollow of his hand.

"Mine is the only race in modern times that has been baptized in fire." As he spoke a hush fell on the throng; eager as they were to insult and ridicule him, they were for the moment still more eager to hear him.

"In every southern state the smoke from our burning bodies has ascended to the nostrils of God. It is not in vain we die! The death scream of the negro martyr will be heard above the howling of his white tormentors! You have made of us burnt offerings to the God of Hate! We make our supplications to the God of Vengeance! Which shall prevail?"

He moved a step backward, then paused and spoke again with bold defiance. "I came among you the advocate of peace. I leave you to declare a war!"

A riot followed. Men struggled to the stage and sought to reach him. A cry was started. "Lynch him! Lynch the nigger! Kill him! Shoot him! To hell with the nigger!" Unmindful of the din and uproar, steady of purpose, Brent fought his way toward the wings. A hundred men surged round him. His clothes were torn. A tall man, reaching above the others, struck him in the face. Brent seized a chair from the platform and swinging it above his head drove his assailants back. They laughed and rushed upon him again. His one thought was to keep his feet. If he went down he would be trampled into insensibility. He was struck from behind and staggered, but before his tormentors could close in upon him help had intervened.

A body of police had entered the building and forced their way to the stage, using their clubs vigorously. They reached the platform, scaled it, and falling upon Brent's assailants, drove them back.

Brent, bleeding and bruised, his clothing torn, was hurried from a side door and rushed through the great throng which surrounded the building. Here his enemies would have rallied, but the police, now reenforced, beat them back and guarded Brent until he was safe within his hotel.

A squad of police was called out to disperse the hooting mob and a heavy guard was placed about the hotel to remain throughout the night. The clerks looked ill at ease and frightened when the great man paused at the desk for a moment on his way to the elevator.

"Have you gentlemen seen Bamford, my agent?" he asked.

"He was over at the telegraph booth a little while ago," the chief clerk answered.

"Well, send him to my room, will you, if you can find him for me? I'm going to wash up and make repairs. I must ask your pardon for coming in in this condition—but we had a little excitement at the hall to-night."

"So we've heard, Doctor. I suppose you're leaving for Cleveland in the morning?" the chief clerk asked as Brent turned toward the elevator.

"Yes, certainly. I speak there to-morrow night, or fight," he added with a hearty laugh.

He was in good spirits now. He wanted to change his clothes and then have a hearty supper and a bottle of champagne. He wanted to talk things over with Bamford. He wanted to be commended, if not for his course, at least for his courage.

But Bamford was nowhere to be found.

In the afternoon, sensing the coming storm, with the instinct of his kind, he had telegraphed the office in New York: "Certain to be a frost. Brent played out. Can't fool them all the time." And before his chief had reached the hotel he had already telegraphed: "Advise closing tour. See papers."

He was awakened in the morning by a bell-boy knocking at his door with a telegram. It read: "Close tour. Notify Brent that we sever all connection and cancel all engagements. Square us with local papers. Return immediately."

Armed with these instructions Bamford sought his fallen chief in his suite of rooms on the floor above. He found Brent already up and dressed and dividing his attention pretty evenly between his breakfast and the morning papers.

"You've raised an awful rumpus, General," the advance man said.

"It looks a little that way," Brent assented, laying down a paper which he had been reading and proceeding with the broiled ham which constituted one item of his substantial breakfast. "Plain speaking doesn't seem to suit these people up here. But from my point of view I don't count these notices so bad."

"There's no fault to find with the space you get. But nobody's going to stand for a riot every time you lecture."

The telephone bell rang. Brent rose to answer its summons.

"What's that?" he demanded. "A message from the mayor to ask when I'm leaving Columbus? What— Police to escort me to the station! Well, well, thank his honor and tell him I'll get out of town as soon as I can if my presence causes him anxiety." He hung up the receiver and turned to Bamford.

"Say, this reminds me of New Orleans," he laughed. "We can get a train out for Cleveland before noon, can't we?" he asked, picking up the paper he had dropped and preparing to resume his reading and his breakfast.

The agent regarded him for one long second. Then he said:

"Not if my firm knows it, we can't. They've wired to close the tour." He tossed the telegram on the table before Brent.

Brent took it up and read it. His expression changed.

"That's pretty sort of loyalty," he scoffed.

"It's the folks' way of doing business."

"I'll sue them for breaking their contract," Brent declared, his anger rising.

"Sue ahead," and Bamford grinned cheerfully. "But after the things you said last night you'll have trouble getting damages. There's no use bucking a stone wall, General. As an entertainer you're down and out."

"They'll have to refuse to open the hall for me in Cleveland to-night. That's all I've got to say." Brent rose. "Just

one thing, Mr. Bamford, if you don't mind telling me, I'd like to know where you were last night?"

"Hunting the cyclone cellar," Bamford replied enigmatically. "Anybody can shoot off dynamite if he likes to, but yours truly is going to keep out of the way when the dirt flies. Well, good-by, General. I'm off for little old New York. They've turned you down. Better go back to the old plantation and cultivate the persimmon and the pickaninny. I'll come down some time and eat possum with you, and we'll talk over the Battle of Columbus."

"Get out!" Brent shouted, striking the table with his clenched hand. "Get out of my presence, and don't you dare to speak to me again! Get out! Get out!"

He brushed the agent from the room and slammed the door. He had counted on a good long talk with Bamford to clear the air. He wanted to hear what people said, to have a little incense burned before him. And this was what had come of it.

"The little whelp," he muttered. "Thinks I'm an entertainer, does he?—turned me down, have they?—well, I'll show him yet. I'll show them all."

Before he left the hotel for the railway station he was encouraged by the receipt of a telegram from his son Eugene. It read: "Have just seen papers. Great talk, Governor. Adriance enthusiastic, too. Gene."

"Good boy, Gene," said Brent to himself, touching the yellow paper fondly. "Good boy, Gene."

Amidst all his satisfaction with himself he was oppressed by the conviction that the result of the night before had ended forever his power of earning money on the platform. And money was his chief need. However, he would not be beaten without another trial. He would see what Cleveland had in store for him. And at least he could feel his strength in the open. He was no longer pent up at Comorn with his sick conscience accusing him at every turn. He was still a factor in the world's affairs. What he lost on the one hand he gained on the other. He was done with the white race

—but he was a greater man to the negroes. There would be some way to find money. Fame and power brought money in their wake, and he had both.

His journey to Cleveland was uneventful. He had a state-room in the Pullman and few of his fellow travelers were aware of his presence on the train.

He rang for the porter and had him open a bottle of whisky which he carried in one of his hand-bags. Cooped up in splendid isolation he became depressed and gloomy. He missed the adulation of Bamford. He missed his funny stories. The country through which the train bore him recalled the Canadian landscape to his mind. He thought of Mrs. Brent and of Celia, and anxiety for their welfare overcame his sense of resentment against Mrs. Brent. He thought of Hortense, and frowned. Things weren't going right with his children. The old friendly affectionate life of his family which had meant so much to him was a thing of the past. He was a great man, he supposed, and he'd be a greater man yet. But he wasn't happy. Without intending to do so he drank a great deal. The habit had grown upon him since Polly Beckford's death, and since his association with Mamie Ann began. At times he shook it off. At times he yielded to it. To-day the latter mood possessed him.

It was still early, although dark, when he reached Cleveland. He was driven swiftly to his hotel, and after going to his rooms to dress he came down-stairs to the public dining-room. He thought the lights and music might relieve his sense of depression and of loneliness. He was unaware that several persons rose and left their tables when he entered. He drank a cocktail, and ordered a bottle of champagne with his dinner.

He intended to telephone to the hall to learn if there would be a large attendance. He did not mean to repeat his tactics of the night before. He would keep to the safe side of the road and deliver one of his old sane conservative talks. He looked at his watch and found he had just time to reach the hall. He left the dining-room hurriedly, neglecting to sign

the check for the waiter. As he was being assisted into his coat the waiter followed him out with the check in his hand.

As he apologized and fumbled in his pocket for money a group of reporters came about him. Before he was aware, he had told them what he thought of the administration for refusing to make him minister to Haiti. There'd be a reckoning at the next presidential election or he was mightily mistaken. He denied that Mrs. Brent had left him; but he was not convincing, for in a moment he was speaking with bitter scorn of his white neighbors who had conspired to rob him even of his wife and child.

When one of the young men asked him if it was true, as reported in the evening papers, that a chambermaid at Columbus had refused to change his bed because he was a negro, he lost his temper and declined to say anything more for publication. As he attempted to escape his tormentors one of them thrust an evening paper before his eyes. It contained Bamford's statement, telegraphed from Columbus, repudiating for his firm all responsibility for Doctor Brent's utterances on the platform and declaring the tour closed.

Beneath this was printed a brief announcement that Doctor Brent would not deliver his lecture in Cleveland that night.

Thoroughly enraged at what he told himself was Bamford's treachery, Brent shook off the reporters, and calling a cab, drove to the hall. The building was dark. His lithographs and bills had been pasted over with the bills of the next attraction. As he gazed up at the darkened building, Brent realized that his career as a public speaker was definitely ended.

He dismissed the cab and started aimlessly away along the street, unmindful of time or distance or direction. Filled with a sudden dread of being recognized, or followed by reporters, he turned from one street into another, buttoning his overcoat high about his chin and drawing his silk hat down to shield his eyes. By no intention of his own he reached a poorer and lower quarter of the city. Here, feeling secure from recognition, he entered a drinking place. He entered another and another. As the evening wore on he fell in with

boon companions and spent the night in wild carousal. He awakened in the station house. He had been drugged and robbed.

He gave a fictitious name, and sending for the local leader of the Black Crusaders, his fine was paid and he was soon released.

The reporters about the court, however, had suspected Brent's identity. And so the news of this final humiliation was telegraphed broadcast over the land. Brent, still resourceful, met the charge with a stout denial. He claimed that his arrest was only a part of a conspiracy to ruin him by his political enemies who feared his power. He assured the world that he would continue to champion the cause of his people at whatever cost to himself.

CHAPTER XLVI

A MASTER OF HOSTS

At the Cross Roads the usual gathering in Mr. Hesketh's store had listened with deep attention while Colonel Washington read aloud the full text of Doctor Brent's Columbus speech. As Colonel Washington folded the paper Grandpa Bird rose to the occasion.

"He was a-talking backwards when he drapped them words, that's what he was a-doing. I always heard he was a mouthy nigger. Lays his tongue to anything, don't he? But you can't expect nothing more from a hog than a grunt. I ain't got no more use for his opinions, an' what you might call his arguments, than what a tick has for a tar barrel. No, sir, he ain't got brains enough to grease a gimlet, 'deed he ain't; an' he ain't got a grain of tack, not a single grain. He can't mix with nobody, North or South, to home or abroad, as you might say, but he fusses with 'em an' makes a heap of talk an' trouble. If he had tack he'd get on a heap better'n what he does, 'deed if he wouldn't. I declare I reckon so."

"What he says sounds well enough, and it's true enough, too, from their side of the question," said Doctor Carniel, who had been an attentive listener while the speech was being read. "But the whole thing is just this: if the negro was really what he thinks he is he'd be fully entitled to what he wants, but he isn't. If every white man in the world was to wake up to-morrow morning black it wouldn't make one of them a negro; and if every negro in Virginia was to wake up white it wouldn't make one of them a white man in the sense we understand it. No, sir, in dealing with this question the first thing is to realize that there is a real difference between the races, a difference as old as time. This man

Brent would have you think it is just a question of complexion. He only touches on the surface of the subject. The negroes haven't got the staying powers for such responsibilities as he would put upon them. It's as if a child wanted to run its father's business. You wouldn't advocate turning the house over to the children to manage and direct, would you? Well, then, you wouldn't want to turn the government of your state or country over to the negroes, would you, for it'd be about the same thing—only a great deal worse. You've got to understand the absolute difference between the negro and the white man before you can understand why we believe in treating them as we do. Every little advance they make we have to keep them up in; we're the harness that holds them in the shafts. We've hitched them up, but we can't prevent any crazy leader like this man Brent from driving them down the wrong road, any more than we can prevent them from running away and smashing things."

"That's so," said Colonel Washington. "There are a heap of good niggers, more good niggers than bad niggers, take 'em all in all, but when it comes to a showdown, gentlemen, there isn't a nigger in the land that's a bit better than the men that are leading them. They're back of their leaders all the time, every man of them, and when they begin to move it won't be in a direction we like. They're all after political power and social equality just as he says they are. What they really want is to reverse positions with the whites. They don't want to progress. They want to usurp. They not only want to come up, but they want us to go down. They want to sit in the big houses with their hands in their laps and watch the white people working for them in their kitchens and fields. That's their idea of equality in the last analysis. We've put up the bars and we mean to keep them up. But how long are they going to hold with ten millions of niggers pressing up and pressing up against them? When the bars break, what then? They're getting through the fences here and there along the line; the frontier's too long to picket night and day, and those who get through keep

calling to the others to come on. Look at us; look at our country. Aren't we all giving way before them? Aren't all our standards lowered? Isn't our every-day life dragged down by our intimate association with them? I tell you we're being submerged, slowly submerged, until it isn't a question of maintaining our standards, our civilization; it's just a question of how we can exist at all. How long is this going to be a white man's country? That's the whole question in a nutshell. As for all they contend for, I say this: they thrive in a white man's country as they never throve in their own. How long will they thrive if they ever make this Black Man's Land?"

"One thing," said Mr. Braxton, gathering up his purchases from the counter, "is pretty certain, and that is that Doctor Brent's career as a lecturer is over. So I suppose we'll see him back at Comorn soon again."

"Lord save us!" ejaculated Doctor Carniel. "I was hoping he'd keep away from here and let us have a little peace. If there ever was a trouble-maker it's that man."

"Indeed if it ain't so," Grandpa Bird agreed. "I declare if it ain't."

"Is the nigger man coming back to Comorn Hall, pap?" Salvadorie demanded from the shelter of such coat tails as his parent still possessed.

"Is that you, Salvadorie?" asked the doctor kindly. "I didn't see you in the shadow."

"Yes, it's me," Salvadorie admitted modestly. "I've been here all the time."

"If he'd take an' wash hisself he wouldn't look so like a nigger," said his father. "Then a body could see that he was white in daylight anyways, but he's tub-shy. Yes, sir, that child's tub-shy. You can't toll him clost to soap an' water, not if you was to take an' offer him a stick of horehound candy, which I ain't a-going to do at present, because I ain't the means, with times bad and winter coming. It's an awful thing to be tub-shy when you're young, for when you get growed up you ain't much time left for washing from one

Sunday to the next, an' it gets put off for one thing an' another. When a body's got care onto his mind he don't feel like triflin' away his time with soap an' water. He ain't no heart for it. No, sir, I like to see 'em wash when they're little, for when they get old they don't feel the need. I been thinking," added Mr. Bird, not disconsolately, but with a gentle melancholy, "I been thinking that a body ain't real well off but twicet into this life. Oncet when he is real young, an' then when he gets real old like grandpap. When you're real little," he continued, unmindful of the patriarch's glittering eye, "when you're real little you don't have to worry an' sweat an' wonder where the next meal's vittles is a-coming from, nor how you're a-going to pay your poll-tax, an' keep off the county, an' when you're real old you kin just set by the fire an' complain to your heart's content, an' nobody'll answer back, nor look to you to do a lick of work. It's an awful thing to have a family to provide for when you ain't real well like I ain't."

"All I hope is that Julius Cæsar keeps away from Comorn," said the colonel as he turned toward the door.

But Brent had no thought of returning to Virginia. To bury himself at Comorn would have been to admit defeat. Instead he hurried to New York and joined his son and Adriance.

Mamie Ann, already on the scene, was not a little alarmed by the course events had taken, but Brent and her brother reassured her. He was not the only great man, Brent laughed, who trod softly over quicksands. There was nothing to be afraid of. They were making a strong fight through the papers and through the Black Crusade organization to convince the negroes of the country that Brent was a martyr to their cause. They were admitting Mrs. Brent's flight; she had been lured away, they said, during her husband's absence, by his enemies.

What the white men of the country thought Brent and his supporters had ceased to care, so long as he could maintain his hold upon his own race; and this now seemed assured for

there was a great rallying to him and to the League throughout the land; everywhere the negroes were responding to his summons to unite and organize. A great enthusiasm filled the race. It would not be long, his lieutenants assured him, until a steady stream of wealth would be pouring into the Central Bank. As general of the League Brent could allow himself any salary he chose; as president and chief stockholder of the Central Bank its funds would be practically at his disposal.

As money began to flow into the treasury of the order, and into the coffers of the bank, he did not seek to hoard it, but spent it freely. He assisted his friends with large donations, and so made himself certain of their support.

He was now called General Brent, and all his letters were so addressed. His mail swelled to huge proportions. A cipher enabled him to correspond with his chief lieutenants without fear of the disclosure of his plans. Everything was done to maintain an air of mystery, and to impress his followers.

To strengthen the League and give it purpose and vitality he found it necessary to advocate strong measures. Every member was to proselyte for the cause. Every member was to seek out not only the friends but the enemies of the League. The order sought to place its agents in every white man's house throughout the South. These agents, seemingly mere servants and farm laborers, but actually spies, were to report every occurrence in the homes of their employers. If an employer was friendly to the negro race it was to be set down to his credit, but if he was an advocate of the Jim Crow laws, or was outspoken in his opposition to the idea of social equality his name was to be entered on the books of the League as an enemy.

Black crosses were set against the names of white men who broke the unknown laws of the League of the Black Crusaders. From his office in New York General Brent could remove every negro laborer from a Georgia plantation in cotton-picking time while the crop rotted in the fields.

Concerted action against the Jim Crow laws was to be advocated. A day was to be set when all over the South negroes

were to offer passive resistance to the hated laws. A great strike was to be called at an opportune time, and such strikes were to be continued until every Jim Crow law had been repealed.

Committees were to be appointed in every city and county in the South to inquire into any discrimination against the negro who sought to register or cast his vote. Eminent legal counsel was to be retained in every southern state to safeguard the rights of the negro voter, and to strike terror into the hearts of those who sought by any means whatever to deprive the negro of his legal rights either in the courts or at the polls.

Great annual conclaves, with imposing ceremonials, were to be held in Washington each autumn to impress the government and to give visible evidence of the power and solidarity of the League.

As money poured into the treasury of the League and into the Central Bank Brent's old colossal dreams returned. His imagination ran riot. He thought in tens of thousands, in millions, in tens of millions, in hundreds of millions. He saw himself the dominating factor in the manipulation of the wealth of a nation. He was in daily consultation with Adriance and with Banister and Nelson. The investment of the funds of the Black Crusaders, and the management of the Central Bank interested and absorbed him; he was not conscious of the guidance of Adriance and his brokers.

At first Brent regarded these funds as a sacred trust. But as time went on he came more and more to consider them much as his private bank-account. He speculated freely and for the most part successfully. Soon he became a picturesque and well-known figure in Wall Street and the banking regions, where he was treated with marked deference by those who profited by his financial operations.

He lived luxuriously in a fine house in a fashionable quarter of the city. He permitted Mamie Ann to plunder him and to sequester large sums of money. He set up a carriage with a footman beside the coachman on the box. He indulged him-

self in every personal extravagance. He made a generous allowance to Hortense, who divided her time between Comorn and Canada.

Hortense seldom stopped in New York. She detested Mammie Ann, and the strife of the women in his house was painful to Brent. He sent Eugene to England to induce Mrs. Brent and Celia to rejoin him, but the mission was fruitless. Neither Mrs. Brent nor Celia could be induced to return to America, nor even to take up their residence in Canada. Mrs. Brent accepted a small allowance from her husband and remained abroad.

As time passed he was accounted a multi-millionaire. But his affairs were in reality in hopeless confusion. He had lost all grasp of the business of the bank, remaining only a splendid figurehead, while its actual management more and more passed under the control of Adriance and Banister and Nelson. At times this troubled him, and he would call for the books, and demand an assurance that the condition of the bank was sound and prosperous. In such moods it required all the address of Adriance, coupled with the influence of his sister, and the plausible talk of Banister and Nelson to quiet his anxiety.

When the mood passed he would ease his conscience by giving largely to any negro charity or church or individual case of need which was brought to his attention. By such acts of generosity he greatly increased his popularity among his own people. He proposed and agreed to pension all the bishops of the negro churches, and their widows. He talked of pensioning all the negro preachers who should reach a certain age.

By paying the highest rate of interest he attracted the deposits of the poor and credulous. His success was so great that he attracted all subsidiary interests, driving all competitors from the field, or forcing them to become tributary to his system. He had on foot a plan for the amalgamation of all the negro savings-banks and financial institutions in the country. He aimed to make it little less than a crime for a negro to deposit money in a bank conducted by white men.

When there were whispers of reckless mismanagement of the funds entrusted to his care he issued a statement to every member of the Black Crusade, and to every depositor, assuring them all that he guaranteed their investments with his private fortune. And they trusted him.

He organized a children's branch of the League, and a woman's auxiliary, and every day his power increased. He was again a formidable figure in the land.

Brent was aging a little. His hair was more grizzled, his massive shoulders stooped somewhat, he leaned more heavily upon his cane, but on the whole the change added to his dignity and his distinction. Friends urged him to begin the preparation of his autobiography, but he shook his head. That was a task for one who had finished with life; for his part, while he was no longer young, his work was in the future.

Now and then Mrs. Dandridge expressed a desire to visit Comorn Hall. But Brent discouraged the idea. The flight of his wife had given him a distaste for the place.

At one time Colonel Macie had written complaining that the property was so run down it would not bring the amount of his mortgage at a forced sale if Brent did not make some effort to keep it up. He suggested that Brent might permit his son, Joe Macie, to live at the Hall and manage the place.

But Brent refused. He wrote that he would take up the mortgage at once. He did not expect to occupy the Hall again, as it was too small for his needs, but it would make a good home for his mother while she lived and Hortense might wish to keep it and add to it at some future time. He was sorry to hear that the property was so run down, but it couldn't be wondered at in his absence; he had been too busy with matters of importance to give it his attention. But he neglected to carry out his purpose and the mortgage was not lifted.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE BETRAYAL

At the beginning of the third year of Brent's residence in New York the approaching presidential election became a matter of deep concern to him. He was at the very zenith of his power. His organization was complete, his will was law to almost every negro voter in the land.

The political contest promised to be as close as it was bitter; vast issues were at stake, and the leaders of both great parties were determined to elect their candidates at any cost. When it developed that in certain doubtful states of the Middle West the negro vote would be decisive, immense pressure was brought to bear upon Brent to secure his support.

Seated at splendid ease before his desk in the private office of his bank he was all but the acknowledged master of the political situation of the country.

Bamford had been the first to bring him an emissary from Conservative headquarters—a man named Driscoll. Brent received his former agent with urbane cordiality, but he had neither forgotten nor forgiven Bamford's desertion in Columbus, and Mr. Driscoll could scarcely have chosen a sponsor less likely to advance his cause.

Brent's attitude throughout the interview was calm and dignified; he listened, but he asked no questions. He invited no overtures.

"The matter is just this, gentlemen," Brent said, brushing aside Mr. Driscoll's plea that the negro vote belonged to his party by right of its service to the negro race. "Whatever my race may have owed you in the past has been well repaid by years of blind loyalty. You have been long in power. Yet steadily the negro has lost caste politically. You have looked

on in silence while the vote has been taken from the negro in almost every southern state; you have entered no national protest to the enactment of the Jim Crow laws. You have appointed a few negroes to minor offices in the South, and a few to minor positions in Washington, but, so far as I know, you have elected not one negro to any important office in the North. You haven't made one negro governor of any northern state, and it has been many years since you have sent a negro to the House of Representatives or to the Senate. You have not appointed a negro to the Supreme Bench. You have not sent a negro to fill any important diplomatic post abroad. Liberia and Haiti have been about the best berths a negro could hope for in the diplomatic service. I was refused the Haitian ministry myself at one time because a senseless hue and cry was raised against me. No, understand me, I seek nothing for myself. I would refuse the Haitian ministry if it were offered to me. I am engaged in business of more importance here at home. Moreover I am quite willing to acknowledge myself a discredited man, so far as the white race is concerned. Justly or unjustly, doesn't matter. I would not hamper the party to which you believe the allegiance of the negro to be due, by asking the smallest office for myself. Personally I want nothing at all. But don't misunderstand me. When it comes to my race I mean to ask a great deal. If you want my support in this election you'll have to pay a fair price for it. I don't claim that I can carry a single state in the Union, I don't claim anything; you are not here because of any claim that I have made. But this I will say, that to secure my support, such as it is, you must bring me a written promise, signed by the chairman of your National Committee, and by another name which at this time I will not mention, agreeing that in exact proportion to the negro vote shall be the party patronage accorded to negroes. Haiti and Liberia won't satisfy us this time, gentlemen. At least one negro shall be sent as an ambassador to Europe, one to Asia, one to South America. There must be a negro in the Cabinet, there must be a negro appointed to the Supreme Bench. Since not one negro

has been nominated for either branch of Congress on your ticket, it becomes necessary to secure our representation by executive appointment exclusively. If your party is willing to deserve the loyalty of the negro voter, and will guarantee that he receives the justice I demand, I stand ready to pledge you his vote."

He rose as he spoke, touching a bell upon his desk to indicate that the interview was at an end. A secretary entered and said that Mrs. Dandridge had been waiting ten minutes to see General Brent.

"You'll excuse me, gentlemen," the great man said. Then added as he shook hands with his former agent: "Glad to have seen you again, Bamford."

"These are your best terms, General?" Mr. Driscoll asked as he rose slowly.

"Absolutely my best terms, Mr. Driscoll," Brent replied decisively.

"I'll report to headquarters," Mr. Driscoll said and turned to leave the room.

As he did so, a woman very richly gowned and wearing a trailing cloak of sable, entered. She was veiled, but through the veil he saw the large eyes and the warm complexion of a mulatto. A fragrance of rare perfume entered the room with her.

Bowing, Mr. Driscoll and Bamford retired leaving General Brent alone with his visitor.

"Who's that woman?" Mr. Driscoll asked the agent as they passed along the corridor toward the outer offices.

"Blessed if I know," said Bamford. "A stunner, wasn't she?"

"Find out who she is," said the gentleman in the confidence of the great political party. "She may be useful. What do you think of his terms? Crazy! Idiotic! That nigger isn't going to do anything for us because he loves us. Of course he was only talking for effect; but the sooner he comes to his senses and talks business the better. The time's getting too short for any damned nonsense."

"You think he'll come to terms?" Bamford asked.

"Of course, only he must be quick about it. That woman isn't his wife?"

"No, don't you remember? His wife's a white woman—she ran away from his place in Virginia not many months after that girl shot herself. She isn't living with him now."

"I'd forgot," said Mr. Driscoll. "All the more reason we'd better learn about this woman. She walked in as if she owned the bank and Brent, too. He'll sell out, of course, but we've got to fix him up before the other people get a chance. They're utterly unscrupulous."

As they passed from the building they saw a smart carriage drawn up before the door. A white coachman and a white footman occupied the box. Prompted by a sudden impulse Mr. Driscoll hailed the footman.

"Is this General Brent's carriage?" he asked sharply.

"No, it's Mrs. Dandridge's carriage, sir," the footman replied, touching the rim of his cockaded hat.

"Dandridge," Bamford repeated as they walked away. "I've heard of her. She's the sister of Adriance; he's one of the big men in the League, a partner of Brent's."

"She's a good deal more than Adriance's sister," said Mr. Driscoll with significance, "or I'm very much mistaken."

"Who were those men, General, and what did they want?" Mamie Ann inquired. "Didn't you see how the tall one stared at me? Isn't my hat on straight?"

Brent told her who his visitors were and the errand that had brought them.

"And what did you say, General?" the woman asked. "That's all right about the race, but I don't see anything in it for you," she said when he had told her the terms he should expect. "Maybe they think you'll do all they want for a thank-you," she added contemptuously.

"I'm not asking anything for myself," Brent said with a lifting of his noble head. "Of course I'd wish to pass upon the names of the men appointed to office, but that's all. These people once refused me an office when I asked it. They'll never

have a chance to offer me another. They can make terms with me as a leader of the negro race, but they can't command my allegiance and reward me as a henchman. That day's gone by. And they know it, too."

The woman moved restlessly about the room for a moment, then she seated herself in a chair and faced Brent across the polished top of his broad desk.

"Say, General," she drawled, "what do you suppose this election business is worth to them—in money?"

"I don't know," Brent answered, frowning. "I can't say. There's a lot involved. It means a great deal to the moneyed interests all over the country. It means patronage, the success of the party; and there is the tariff question. It means a good deal more than a man can put into figures."

"It might mean hundreds of thousands?"

Brent nodded assent.

"It might mean millions?" she asked in a lowered voice.

"Yes. I reckon it would mean millions. Yes, many millions."

"And they'd give you—in money?"

"Anything I'd ask," his reply came slowly. "But I'm not asking anything."

There was a silence, then the woman spoke again.

"Business has been rotten on the stock exchange lately," she said irrelevantly.

"We're on the safe side," Brent answered. "I had a talk yesterday with Banister and Nelson."

"What did they tell you? If anything happened to the bank you'd be in pretty deep, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, I suppose so. But nothing is going to happen to the bank. We're as sound as any institution in the country, and we're growing richer every day."

There was a pause, then Mrs. Dandridge said:

"I wish you'd make a business arrangement with those gentleman."

"Sell out to them, I suppose you mean?" Brent demanded.

"Why not? You say they'd pay you anything you asked."

Suppose things do seem all right just now, you can't expect them to go on like this forever. If anything should happen to the bank—" She paused, not daring to say more.

"What do you mean?" he questioned angrily. "That's the second time you've spoken of something happening to the bank. What's going to happen to the bank? We've all been spending money pretty freely; you've had your share, and so's your brother. Eugene has been extravagant and careless, too, and I've been giving too much here and there. But it's all been building up the organization, getting in shape for bigger things. It's all been like an investment, and now we're on our feet. Banister and Nelson haven't made a losing speculation. It won't be long before this bank is sounder than the Bank of England."

"If you'd make the right kind of deal with those men you could put the bank where it ought to be—and have enough to put by for your old age, too."

"I'm not worrying about a provision for my old age yet," Brent said with dignity.

"Well I am," the women responded angrily. "And I'm worrying about myself, too. I don't like the way things are going. You trust Banister and Nelson too much. You take their word for everything. You even believe the figures they show you. Where'd I be if anything happened? I've got some money put away, and I've got my diamonds, but how long would all that last, living the way I'm used to live? And there's Eugene. Why don't you think of him? He can't live on his salary. You might think about such things a little and make a deal with those men for every cent you can squeeze out of them. I'd just like to have a chance to talk to them." She leaned toward him across the desk, smiling her most alluring smile. "Who'd ever know?"

"I'd know," Brent answered laconically.

"It's the party our people have always voted for, isn't it? It won't hurt them to vote for it again."

"They'll vote for it if I say so, and they'll vote against it if

I tell them to. And that's what I'm going to do if those gentlemen don't come to my terms."

"They put a nigger in the Cabinet, put a nigger in the Supreme Court! Send a nigger ambassador abroad!" Mamie Ann laughed derisively. "You're a big man, General, but you'll have to be twice as big before you can make them promise that."

"They'll promise it, and they'll give me good surety that they'll fulfil their promises, or, by God, I'll turn them out of office and seat the man they're most afraid of in the White House. Perhaps I can't make them do what I want, but they'll learn that there is just one nigger in these United States that they can't buy and they can't boss, and that J. C. Brent's that nigger."

"Don't be a fool!" the woman cried, rising and coming close to him as though by her physical presence to compel his agreement. "This is the biggest chance you'll ever get. It's the chance of a lifetime. They'll make you minister to Haiti, they'll back the bank, they'll give you hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, they'll owe the election to you. I wish Eugene was here to talk sense to you. He'd tell you not to throw a chance like this away. You ought to telegraph him to come back from Texas."

"Leave Eugene out of this," Brent answered roughly. "What about our people? What about them?"

"I'm not thinking about our people. I'm thinking about ourselves."

"That's just the difference then. I'm thinking about my people. They've put this power into my hands, and I'm going to use it for their advantage, not for my own."

"Don't talk that crazy talk to me," Mamie Ann cried, throwing aside all caution. "You can't fool me. You don't think I believe you really give a damn for all the niggers in America?"

He pushed her from him with his outstretched hand.

"Listen to me," he said, frowning as he regarded her. "I'm

going to tell you something. I'm not the man I was when you knew me first, and even then I wasn't the man you thought I was. I know now what you and your brother thought about me well enough. You thought I was a stuffed prophet, a fake reformer, the same old nigger leader ready to fool the niggers and sell out when the time came." He shook his head as his habit was, and stared before him into vacancy. "I don't know what I was, I don't know what I am. I know I've done some awful things; that girl who shot herself, her blood's on my hands more than it's on Gene's; and there's Miss Constance and her son; that's on my conscience, too; and there's my wife; as good a woman as ever lived. You know what's happened to her. And Celia. Her mother couldn't trust her to my care, and she was right. I reckon she was right. And there's Hortense; I've done those things, likely I'd do them all over again. And maybe there's worse things yet to come. I sometimes think there are, but there's just one thing I won't do. I won't sell out the power my people give me to any politicians on this earth. They'll come to my terms or it will cost them the election. I love my people! There's no use your ever speaking to me about this again. My mind's made up."

Mrs. Dandridge trailed to the door, then turned and trailed back insolently and said:

"It's a pity you didn't remember how much you loved your people before you began squandering their money for your own amusement. Where'd you stand with the nigger voters of America if they knew the real figures on the books of this bank as I know them?" She snapped her fingers scornfully. "That's about all the influence you'd have," she added as she left the room.

Later that afternoon Mamie Ann telephoned her brother and with him arranged a conference with Banister and Nelson to which General Brent was not invited.

When Mr. Driscoll saw General Brent again he was accompanied not by Bamford, but by a much more important person, Senator Hildreth. Mr. Driscoll said little and permitted the senator to be the spokesman of his party.

The senator explained to Brent that while he was himself a sincere friend of the negro, and while he hoped to see the time when the negro should be permitted a more important part in the government, he felt, and his associates felt, that the time had not yet come for such a participation as General Brent desired. He could, however, promise him an assistant-secretaryship, say in the Department of Agriculture, the Haitian ministry, the Liberian post, and perhaps some other diplomatic appointment to one of the lesser Asiatic states. Anything further was out of the question except the usual collectorships and minor appointments which had already, by usage, been assigned to gentlemen of the colored race. More appointments of this class would be made than formerly; that was all of a political nature to which he felt he could definitely pledge his party.

Outside political rewards, and speaking generally, the senator continued significantly, there were, of course, a hundred ways by which the friends of a great party might show their appreciation of Doctor Brent's support. Doctor Brent was the head of a financial institution, which must surely profit by the good will of the greatest financial powers of the nation, just as it might suffer from their ill will or indifference. The election promised to be close, the party did desire the support of all its friends among the negro voters, but it would perhaps be too much to suppose that there was any real likelihood of the negro voter casting the deciding vote. He was sure General Brent would understand him.

Brent listened attentively and without comment until the senator finished speaking and paused for his reply.

"I have no desire," he said with quiet dignity, "I have no desire, Senator, to magnify the importance of the negro vote in this election. You understand what it means to your party much better than I do. I appreciate that your offer of patronage is a generous one, judged by the standards of the past. But my stand is one of principle. The demands I made upon the gentlemen who first mentioned this matter to me are the demands I make to-day. I can not modify them in the least."

They are the only terms upon which you can rely upon the support of the negro voters of this country."

"I am certain," said the senator smoothly, "that we may be able to find some middle ground. There must be compromise in everything."

"Not in this case," Brent answered with decision.

The senator wondered smilingly if Doctor Brent really possessed the influence over the negro voters which he assumed to possess.

"You wouldn't be here, gentlemen, if you didn't believe it. And you must bear in mind that I am not asking the slightest favor, nothing whatever until after the election, nothing indeed until after the fourth of March next, when the president takes the oath of office, and then I'm asking only simple justice for my race."

As time went on and the day set for the election drew nearer more and more pressure was brought to bear upon Brent to alter his position, but he stood firm and refused to yield the smallest point.

He found Adriance, influenced by his sister, strongly opposed to his attitude, and Banister and Nelson also urged him to modify his demands and make terms with the agents of the great party which sought his influence. But he stubbornly held out against them all.

Eugene, on the contrary, who had been sent to Texas in the interests of the League, wrote warmly approving the stand his father had taken.

Brent's days were crowded with preparation for the coming conflict. He issued his orders to his state leaders and lieutenants, to all of whom he submitted the demands he had made upon the agents of the party, and prepared to visit the Central West to be present in the most critical section to direct his forces.

Up to the very moment of his departure he was beset by Mamie Ann and her brother to make terms with Senator Hil-dreth while he could. But he refused and started West to devote the two weeks preceding the election to strengthening his

lines. If they held he would control the situation absolutely. If it came to a test of strength he meant to be the victor.

After a few days spent in Indiana and Illinois, Brent turned southward to Cincinnati. At the news stand in the station he bought the morning papers. The glaring head-lines caught his eye. He stood where he was and read them, horror-stricken.

"The Great Negro Bank of New York closed by government inspectors. Banister and Nelson absconded. General Brent's whereabouts unknown. The bank looted by Brent, Banister and Nelson. Reckless speculation precipitates crash of institution supposedly sound. Negro investors throughout the country ruined. Funds of the League of the Black Crusaders swept away. Disclosures made by Adriance, a former associate of General Brent, reveal the chaotic condition of the bank. Brent probably a fugitive."

It was as plain as day. Adriance and his sister, perhaps with the connivance of Banister and Nelson, had sold him out to the agents of the great political party which, since they could make no terms with him, were bent on destroying his hold upon the negro voter. They had struck at his one vulnerable point, his recklessness and mismanagement of the funds entrusted to his care.

There would still be time enough before the election to convince every negro in the land that he had been false to the trust reposed in him; how could he then hope to convince them that he had remained true to the greater moral trust he had assumed.

He walked to the telegraph office and wrote several messages, one to Eugene asking him to come north at once, and one to a New York paper, saying that he was in Cincinnati, that he had not fled, and would return immediately to head the investigation into the affairs of the bank. He sent telegrams to various negro papers, denying the charges and saying the closing of the bank was due to the activity of his enemies who sought to discredit him for political ends.

He found that a train left for New York within an hour.

He spent the time writing telegrams to his lieutenants and supporters throughout the country. He felt that he had been mortally stricken by the blow, but he meant to fight bravely. He saw himself in his larger and more heroic aspect, if his shipwreck was complete, all the more reason that he should not strike his flag. His black flag with its crimson cross. He felt quite an old man as the porter assisted him to mount the steps to the Pullman. The porter was a young man, and touched his cap obsequiously, and called him General. Brent was known to him, of course, as he was known by his portrait to every negro in the land.

Brent held up the papers in his hand.

"All lies," he said in a hoarse voice. "All lies. I'm on my way back to New York to fight this matter out. They've tried to stab me in the back, to sell me out to the politicians, but we'll see if they are able to do it. When you see any of my people tell them General Brent wasn't running away."

Quick tears came into the young man's eyes as Brent leaned heavily upon him. All day long Brent sat in his stateroom and wrote telegrams while the faithful porter came and went with whatever papers he could procure at cities where the train stopped, and with whatever gleam of hope he could afford the great man.

When the train reached New York, he would accept no fee, but Brent slipped a massive ring from his finger and pressed it upon him.

"You keep this to remember me by," he said, forcing the ring into the young man's hand.

"I don't need nothing to remember you by, General, and I don't want nothing for serving you."

"Keep it," said Brent, "and don't forget me."

The boy's faith had rekindled a little gleam of hope in his heavy heart.

His first effort was to find Adriance and his sister and to force them to retract their charges. If he could compel them to confess that they had betrayed him for a price he might

still hold the allegiance of the negro and wreak his vengeance at the polls on those who had sought his ruin.

But the editor and his sister were nowhere to be found, and Brent was quickly involved in a network of legal difficulties which entangled him more and more each day. He engaged lawyers and made a stout defense. He admitted freely that he had used certain moneys of the League to reimburse himself for sums advanced, that he had accepted a high salary, that he had not watched the affairs of the bank so closely as he should, that he had been too prone to accept the statements of others; but he insisted that he had always acted for what he considered the best interests of the bank and for the good of the negro race.

He was unfeignedly astonished at the actual condition of the bank's finances. The books for months past had been falsified to cover the sums which Banister and Nelson had lost in reckless speculation. Brent was certain that Adriance and his sister had been parties to the deception practised upon him, but proof was lacking. And he soon discovered that when he had engaged a lawyer pressure was brought to bear upon him until his usefulness was at least open to suspicion.

There was talk of indicting Brent for wrecking the bank and his arrest at one time seemed certain. But his return to New York, and his courageous efforts to defend himself and save his institution made it dangerous to add the halo of persecution lest by so doing the sympathies of the negroes should be again aroused in his behalf.

Brent issued statements which the papers printed readily enough, claiming that the wrecking of the bank was the result of a conspiracy entered into between the agents of a great political party and Banister and Nelson and Adriance, for the sole purpose of destroying his influence with the negro voters of the country. He charged Driscoll and Senator Hildreth with carrying out the scheme.

In the midst of the bitter controversy and recrimination, with Brent facing grave charges and still threatened with ar-

rest, the day of the election came and passed. The negro voters, confused and divided, believing themselves betrayed by their leader, resentful of their losses, either refrained from voting or voted with the party which had held their allegiance in the past. The men whom Brent now regarded as his personal as well as his political enemies were returned to power and his own overthrow was complete.

In a few weeks he and his affairs had sunk to insignificance. No effort was made to discover the whereabouts of Banister and Nelson in Europe, nor to bring them to America to stand trial for their part in wrecking the great bank. Powerful influences were presumed to be at work to hush the matter up. Even Brent was not molested, and the talk of indicting him was no longer heard.

The moneyed interest of the country had narrowly escaped being driven from power by General Brent's organization and there was no desire to make a martyr of the fallen leader. It was not desirable to goad him to the last extremity, for there was something stubborn and formidable in the man, which Senator Hildreth had sensed, which might yet become a menace if he turned at bay.

To ruin and discredit him was safe enough; to persecute him might be dangerous. He was bankrupt and beggared as it was. Brilliant lawyers could perhaps have secured his indictment and trial, and a judge might well have sentenced him to a term in prison. But such a trial must be open, evidence must be had, witnesses called and examined, an adverse sentence might be appealed; a resourceful man might regain his popularity even if he went to prison, and four years later might take his revenge at the next presidential election.

"No. He's down and out," said Senator Hildreth, "and he's down and out as a result of his own neglect and bad business management. His party's scattered, and he's no one to blame for it all but himself, and he knows it and his people know it. The way the negroes voted shows that. We will probably be able to hold them in line for years to come. If on the other hand we went to extremes, or permitted others to do so, we

have no means of knowing the sort of fight that man Brent might put up. You can't tell what he would say or do. You can't tell what might come out of it if you put Adriance or his sister on the stand. No. No. Let well enough alone. He's no common man, gentlemen. He's almost as big a man as he thinks himself, and he almost had us by the throat. I'm perfectly convinced if we hadn't got hold of that woman and her brother and been able to scare Banister and Nelson out of the country and so bring on the crash, he'd have beaten us in a fair fight at the polls. I don't think there's much fight left in him now, because he knows he has only himself and the treachery of his own associates to blame. But push him too far and I won't answer for the consequences. He might set up a war cry that would bring every negro in the land flocking back to his standard. Yes, sir, even those who betrayed him. It's in him to do it."

"Then you really think, Senator, that a time will come when we must seriously reckon with the negro in party and in public life?" asked a gentleman who had been an attentive listener. "You really believe they'll some day be a power?"

"It's just a question of leadership," the senator replied. "Let a leader arise who can control them and focus their power and we'll have to give them all they ask. They almost had such a leader in this man Brent. It wouldn't take much to make him such a leader yet. My whole idea is to eliminate him from a national position, to let him go back to Virginia and localize him there if possible. His plantation, I understand, is in his wife's name, so that can't be taken from him by his creditors. That's where he ought to go. It's only when he gets out in the limelight that he's really dangerous, for I tell you, gentlemen, whether we like it or not, the truth is, General Brent represents our injustice to ten millions of American citizens—it's not safe to make such a man a conspicuous martyr. He may not be so strong as Samson, he may not have the strength to pull down the temple, but he's strong enough yet to shake our institutions to their foundations if he only knew it."

"There's a roar left in the old lion then, you think, Senator?"

The senator slowly nodded his head, much as Brent himself might have nodded his head in assent had he heard the question.

"Things look badly, Governor, don't they?" Eugene said when, on his return from Texas, he heard his father's statement of affairs. "The thing I can't get over is that Adriance and his sister should have sold you out. Don't you think it's in the negro character to play a straight game, Governor, and to play it through to the end?"

"I don't know, Gene," Brent answered somberly. "That's the whole question. But I can't answer it. I'm not sure of myself, and so I'm not sure of any man. I've had success in my hands over and over again, and every time I've fooled it away. I've fooled it away."

"Don't talk like that, Governor. You'll win out. You've had a hard knock, but they haven't finished with you yet." And he put his hand affectionately upon his father's shoulder.

"Don't you think so, Gene?" Brent asked with a wistfulness which touched the young man's heart. "I don't know that I'll ever make another start. Do you know what I'd like to do, Gene?" he added with a certain hunger and longing in his voice.

"What, Governor?" Eugene encouraged him.

"I'd like to go back to Comorn with you and Hortense. I'd like to farm the old place as I once thought I'd farm it. I'd like to live down some things I've done. I'd like to win the good will of every decent white man there before I die—and I'd like to have Celia and her mother come home again and live there with us." He paused, a wry smile twisting his heavy lips, a strange gleam in his eyes. "I want things that can't be. I want the quiet sunset, when I know there's nothing but the storm before me."

CHAPTER XLVIII

COMORN AGAIN

Toward the end of December it became plain to Brent that he was gaining nothing by his futile efforts in New York. Eugene had obtained a position in a broker's office under an assumed name. Brent did not confess his poverty to Eugene, but when he left New York early in January he was forced to pawn his watch and rings to enable him to return to Comorn to face the ruin that impended there.

Before his departure he had received disquieting letters from his mother, written for her by Fred Catchiniel, hinting that Hortense needed him, and asking him to come home as soon as possible.

He parted from Eugene with sincere regret. A sense of boding apprehension was upon him as he left the city, but before he reached Washington he had shaken it off and was busy rebuilding his career in that great land of day-dreams where each is the architect of his own fortunes and all rear palaces that touch the sky. Brent was a mighty builder of such palaces and to the end a dreamer of great dreams.

It was still early when he found himself in Washington, and moved by an impulse he had often felt, he made his way on foot to the quarter of the city where Mrs. Delafield resided. He had mounted the steps and had rung the bell before he was aware that his act had translated his impulse into a definite purpose.

He was admitted to the house and a servant took his name to Mrs. Delafield. In speaking of her experience afterward, the great Mrs. Delafield never could very clearly explain to her own satisfaction, nor perhaps quite to the satisfaction of her listener, why she consented to see the discredited leader of the Black Crusade.

Brent was quickly and painfully conscious that he had been received with more surprise than pleasure. Yet he did not withdraw. He did not remember that Mrs. Delafield had asked him to sit, yet he seated himself heavily and entered at some length upon an explanation of his position, and a defense of his actions.

Mrs. Delafield was reserved and remote; her attitude was momentary in the extreme; her attention seemed to wander, and annoyance might have been traced about her lips, and yet she listened.

To her appraising sense this ruined leader of a lost cause, this almost fugitive, this veteran of disaster, was more the true leader and prophet than the urbane Doctor Brent who had come, full of assurance, to thank her for the loan of her carriage years before.

Plainly he was aged, plainly he groped and doubted, plainly he sought for counsel and support. Some strong drift of need or weakness, some longing to shelter his broken spirit under wide pinions, some instinct of the masculine nature to seek comfort and strength from a woman; some old blood instinct of the slave to yield to the mastery of a dominant nature, or all combined, urged him on to disregard all caution and to speak of the hope he had cherished of uniting his fortunes and his life with hers.

He spoke of the flight of his wife, and, though Mrs. Delafield had risen with a quick gesture of disdain, he said he had thought he might secure his release if Mrs. Delafield would give him any hope. Even yet he might retrieve his fortunes.

"How absurd, how unprovoked, how insulting!" he heard Mrs. Delafield murmur as she moved toward the door.

To cover his chagrin he stammered something to the effect that her decision might have been different had he been white.

The word caught Mrs. Delafield's ear. She paused in the doorway and turned.

"Not if you were purple!" she said, and swept from the room.

Later, in conversation with an intimate friend, Mrs. Delafield alluded to the affair. "Conceive, if you can, my dear, the feelings which possessed me. It was quite as though I had been asked to espouse a gorilla. Consider being sought in marriage by a middle-aged Hottentot, with one wife already. How astounding! How romantic, yet how vulgar!"

Brent returned to Comorn desperate. The victoria, once his pride, now dirty and neglected, was drawn up under the low bluff at the landward end of the wharf. His nephew Tiger occupied the box.

The group of white men on the wharf drew back and apart as he crossed the gangplank. No one greeted him; even the negroes eyed him askance and let him go by in silence. The story of his downfall had long since preceded him and there were whispers of lost savings, and of unpaid wages among the negro hands.

He was no longer the general of the Black Crusaders. Bishop Comfort had succeeded to his office soon after his virtual expulsion from the League. He was no longer the acknowledged leader of his race.

Every one in Northmoreland knew of the mortgage which hung over him, every one knew it was only a question of time until Colonel Macie would turn him out of Comorn Hall.

He walked the little distance to the shore with bowed head, and clambered heavily into the ruined carriage, half stumbling as his lame and uncertain foot groped for the mud-caked step. He heard a laugh behind him.

Tiger started the horses slowly.

"Can't you hurry?" Brent demanded. "I want to get home. I don't want to take their dust."

The boy whipped up the horses.

"Ain't any dust that I can see," he muttered.

"Why didn't Miss Hortense come to the wharf to meet me?" Brent asked when they were well away from the landing place.

"Miss Hortense she ain't at the Hall now. She didn't know you was expected."

"Where is she, then?"

"Tell me about Hortense. Tell me what made her leave Comorn? Wasn't there any place she could go but to Burnt Quarter?"

"Hortense's been gone near two months now. 'Deed I reckon she got sick of seeing nothing but niggers here. An' when she heard that things had gone so bad with you she jus' give up. She jus' give up. An' Joe Macie's white. I reckon that's something. She was so sick an' tired of niggers, so sick an' tired of common low-down niggers."

To Brent, as he followed his mother from cheerless room to cheerless room, the place seemed literally accursed. There was a touch of pathos in the effort Hamp and his mother had made to prepare for his return. But such poor comfort as they had achieved was rude and intermittent. There was no idea of order or permanence. Everything seemed to go by fits and starts; the domestic arrangements jerked along or broke down altogether.

What was the home of the Beverleys worth to him, he thought, if it was to be lived in after such a fashion.

He became silent, wondering if his presence would have sufficed to check the neglect which had set in on every side. He was wondering if many of the signs which he now saw so plainly had not been visible to others even before he went away, though they had gone unnoticed by himself. He had poured money out like water, but ever since his wife's illness, and doubly since her flight, the place had taken on a different look. It bore no longer the aspect of a white man's home. He shivered and his face grew gray.

"Things ain't looking right, is they?" his mother asked, reading his dissatisfaction in his face. "'Deed they ain't, an' that's the Lord's truth. Me an' Hamp's been that out-done to see things going like they is. If you doan' reckon you is going to be here long yo' better send to Burnt Quarter for Hortense. She's more like white folks than we is, an' she can make the niggers 'tend to things a heap better than we can. Doan' seem like they pay no attention to what nobody says since Mrs. Brent's left home."

The next day Brent rowed across the cove to Burnt Quarter. Half-way from the landing he was met by Joe Macie.

"Hello, Doc," the young man hailed him cheerfully. "Say, how's the banking business? Can't fool them all the time, can you, Doc?"

"Where's my daughter?" Brent asked, ignoring the young man's levity. "I want to see Hortense at once."

"Oh, you're welcome to see her. She's up to the house, I reckon. They've been carrying on so scandalously at Comorn since you've been away that she couldn't stay there any longer. I'm not taking up for Hortense, but I must say she couldn't stand those niggers making love to her and acting as if she was just like the rest of them, and when old man Mably began to get too gay I just invited her to come over to Burnt Quarter and keep house for me."

"Are you married to my daughter?" Brent demanded.

"Not that I know of," came the prompt and genial response.

"Then you'd better be," said Brent.

The young man laughed.

"Oh, hell, what's the use? I've got Hortense and I reckon I'll get Comorn, too, when the old man passes in his checks."

"You'd better marry her, or she'll never have a penny, nor an acre of mine."

"Oh, quit your bluffing, Doc. You know you haven't got a cent left anyway, and father'll get Comorn Hall whenever he wants to close in on you. You know the old man, and you'd have been wise to take up that mortgage when you had the cash. I wonder you didn't. Now you're broke, you ought to be glad I've taken Hortense off your hands. After the way you treated your wife for that Dandridge woman you can't expect us young folks to keep a Sunday-school class."

"Will you marry Hortense?" Brent demanded.

"What's the use, Doc? And anyway I couldn't do it. It's against the law in Virginia. You know that as well as I do. Hortense could pass for white anywhere, but you've kicked up such a fuss that you've tarred the whole family. Everybody knows she's your daughter. I've got my good name to think of."

"Your good name," scoffed Brent. But he controlled his smoldering rage and said: "You could take her north and marry her, even if you had to live up there. She can't stay here this way. I've come to take her home."

Joe Macie smiled his genial smile, showing his even teeth.

"Well, you can take her if she wants to go," he agreed. "But I don't reckon she'd stay very long. She'd get sick of old man Mably hanging round. She seems to like Burnt Quarter just a little better than she likes Comorn Hall these days. You can go on up to the house and see her, but I don't reckon it'll do you any good. I'm going on back to the Cross Roads as soon as I get hitched up. I'll be home in a couple of hours. You talk it over with Hortense."

He laughed derisively and went on toward the stable. Brent made his way to the house. At the door his daughter met him.

"You didn't expect to see me here, did you, father?" she asked, smiling her wonderful smile as he kissed her. "Come in and I'll tell you all about it." And she drew him into the house.

"You shouldn't have left your home, Hortense," he said. "Why didn't you write to me if you were so unhappy there?"

"I couldn't stay there as things were going. And what was the use of adding to your anxiety? Joe wanted me to come here; there wasn't anywhere else to go, and so I came. He likes me, and he's kind to me, and anyway what does it matter? I should have gone away when mother and Celia went. That's what I should have done. But this was easier."

Then she spoke of Eugene and of the failure of the bank, and of the treachery of Adriance and his sister.

"I always hated that woman. I never trusted her. She drove Celia and mother away. Yes, and she kept me away from you, and now she's brought this ruin on you."

She tried to lead him to talk of the future, but he seemed to have lost his old vital grasp upon things. He was profoundly disheartened by the conditions at Comorn, but he seemed to have no thought beyond clinging to the place.

As she looked at her father, bent and aged to her eyes, a

great pity for him rose in her heart. All the ruin which had fallen upon him seemed but a prelude to some fresh disaster.

"Why don't you go back to Canada?" she asked.

He shook his grizzled head.

"It's too late for that."

"But you ought not to stay here. If you went back to Montreal and took up your practise again, mother and Celia might come home. I wish you'd go back. What will you do when you leave Comorn Hall?"

"They'll never take Comorn away from me. I've made up my mind about that. It's cost me too much. A man doesn't pay such a price for a thing he doesn't mean to keep. Colonel Macie shan't set his foot in Comorn Hall as its master while I live. It's my house till I leave it."

"But if he has a mortgage, father, you can't prevent him from taking the place," Hortense urged.

"We'll see if I can't," said Brent. "Maybe I've got a mortgage on Brentwood, too."

A brief period of nominal ownership remained to him before the date when Colonel Macie could foreclose the mortgage. He sought to make the most of this respite.

If the property could once more be put in good condition he might be able to secure a renewal of the mortgage by some northern capitalist or negro banker. He humbled himself to write to Bishop Comfort to ask if he would secure such a loan for him, but the new general of the Black Crusaders did not reply. Losing heart, he even considered the possibility of selling Comorn for a sum sufficient to give him a fresh start in life after the mortgage had been paid.

He was hampered at every turn by the need of petty sums. He could no longer pay his bills. He had to discharge the men he had hired to help him in the task of improving conditions at Comorn.

Hortense, who came and went from Burnt Quarter, soon learned of her father's embarrassment and sought to aid him. She made an excuse to visit Washington and sold such jewels and trinkets as she had and gave the money to him. She

wrote Eugene of her father's desperate needs and he responded as generously as his own slender means permitted.

With this assistance, Brent managed for a time, but he made little headway. He soon realized that even if he could hold Colonel Macie in check, he could not long maintain Comorn without some income derived from other sources. He wrote to various editors who had once been eager to secure his contributions. But he had lost his old dispassionate quality. He urged his merits too insistently and his efforts were without results.

At last, utterly disheartened and discouraged, he abandoned his farming and for a time lived upon the proceeds of the sale of his horses and cattle and the farm machinery which had cost him so much in the years of his opulence. The sums he realized were pitifully small.

The pressure of constant unalleviated anxiety made him morose and sullen. His old urbanity of manner left him entirely. He ceased to take any pride in his appearance. He had long seasons of brooding and depression followed by seasons of unreal hilarity. Alone in the fields he talked and muttered to himself.

He kept telling himself over and over that he was J. C. Brent of Comorn Hall, that he would show them yet. They'd have to reckon with him yet, when his plans got under way. He assured himself of his own greatness, and of the part he would still play in the world despite his enemies. His brain ached when he tried to face conditions as they were and solve his problems.

The strain told upon him. He missed the support of his wife's presence. He had courage for prosperity, but adversity found him deficient. Often he would waken in the night, perhaps from some dream of his childhood, and lie staring into the darkness, trying to repeople the past, trying to imagine himself again old Doctor Brent's yellow boy, Julius Cæsar, back in the cabin at the Brentwood quarters, in happy slavery days; a child again, care-free, with no sickening dread of the dawn and the day the dawn would bring; a slave child

with a life before him of freedom, not a free man who had come to be the slave of conditions. The old masters, he thought, had been more merciful than the new.

He felt his standards were crumbling, his grasp weakening. Now no white men ever crossed his threshold; even Colonel Macie held aloof. He knew of no errand save one that could ever again bring them to his door.

He had ceased to feel safe in Comorn. He double-locked all the doors, and had strong fastenings placed on the windows to secure them. He kept a loaded revolver in his bureau drawer, and he never went out unarmed.

He talked to his mother and Hamp a great deal of the past. He was lonely and frightened and unhappy. He felt his age; he was daunted. He felt he could never regain what he had lost.

One futile day followed another. Courage and action were things of the past; life itself seemed a thing of the past. He was old and weary, in an old and weary world. He had been swept out of the current of life into a stagnant backwater.

To him, at such moments, he and his mother and Hamp were just "a parcel of niggers," who should have been out at the quarters, and his white wife, who had sat on the edge of the very bed where he lay, washing the blood from her haggard face, that fugitive creature, penniless for aught he knew in a foreign land, was their only refuge. He would have given anything to recall her to his side. Her mere presence in the house had been a safeguard and a protection. She was a white woman. She had a white woman's ideas, a white woman's definite standards, a white woman's way of looking at things.

CHAPTER XLIX

EUGENE AT COMORN

Brent, seated on the river porch at Comorn on a warm August evening, was attracted by the faint chug-chug of a launch far up the river. He heard it, made mental note of it again, and again forgot it. Supper was over. He could hear the voices of his mother and Hamp as they gossiped in the Hall.

Judge Beckford and Mrs. Beckford had returned the week before. They had come to place a monument over the grave of their daughter in the family burial ground at Avalon. At first it had been reported that they would remain for a few days only, but now it was said that Mrs. Beckford would never again leave the house, from the window of which she could look upon her daughter's grave. It was of the homecoming of the Beckfords that Hamp and Old Hetty were speaking.

Brent rose and left the porch to escape the sound of the half-heard voices; passing through the long box-walk, he reached the terraces which overlooked the lowlands and the mighty river. Here he paused, trying in the twilight to trace the fields, now partially overgrown by woodlands, where he had once labored as a slave.

To the left, across the cove, were the lowlands of Brentwood. He thought that a thread of misty vapor lying above the tree-tops might be the smoke from the kitchen chimney. It recalled the happy days of his boyhood, and a heaviness came over him, a gloom and sadness; as he stood on the quiet terrace with the peaceful fields beneath spreading away to the river, and all the calm of evening resting like a benison upon the land, while the glory of the amber sunset lingered in the

sky, a keen sense of loneliness came over him, and of longing for departed days, for voices he should never hear again, for faces he should never see again, for summers gone forever. There on the peaceful terrace in the warm twilight with the voices of the frogs rising from the marshes, the emptiness of the days of his manhood overcame him, and the days of his youth alone seemed glorified.

He lifted his head and with eyes half-closed looked out across the river to the far unchanging rim of the Maryland shore, remembering how as a slave boy he had often stolen away from the great house to that very spot to watch the fishing boats, and the wood boats, and the infrequent steamers which had seemed to him as the fleets of the world.

Chug, chug, chug, he heard the launch; chug, chug, chug. He made it out clearly enough now. It was half a mile off shore and making direct for his own landing. His attention attracted, his curiosity became aroused, and he turned from the terrace and made his way slowly along the path which led downward to the beach.

Chug, chug, chug, he heard the launch throbbing and throbbing over the tranquil waters.

The dusk had deepened when the little boat ran swiftly in alongside the landing and hovered there a moment. A figure sprang ashore. Then without sound of voices the boat drew off and turning shot away, its engine throbbing, into the curtain of darkness which overhung the river.

Brent advanced more quickly. The man on the wharf had paused to collect his bags; at the sound of Brent's footsteps he started up, turned, listened. Then a low laugh echoed over the water.

"Who's that?" Brent called, pausing.

"Don't you know me, Governor?" a familiar voice replied.

"Gene!" Brent cried, alarm mingling with his surprise.

"Gene! What's brought you here? Why did you come?"

"I thought you'd be glad to see me. I've lost my job and I'm broke, Governor, dead broke."

"My dear Eugene," said Brent as he embraced his son. "My

dear boy. You shouldn't have come to this place. Never. Never."

"Why not? That old business? Oh, that's blown over and been forgotten long ago. Anyway, it wasn't my fault. I couldn't help it. You don't suppose for a moment I ever thought the poor girl would go to such a length—"

"Hush, take care," his father urged. "Don't talk so loud. No one must know that you are here. Judge Beckford came home a week ago. They're going to stay at Avalon."

"I didn't know that." The young man's voice had changed. "It might be awkward if the judge and I should ever meet. Have you seen him?"

"No, I haven't seen him. I never want to see him."

"What brought him back, I wonder?"

"They're putting up a monument over her grave."

"Who's at the Hall now?" Eugene asked, taking up his bags.

"There's no one there but your grandmother and my half-brother Hamp, and his boy Tiger."

"We can trust them, can't we?"

"Your grandmother, of course, and perhaps she'll know how to make Hamp and Tiger hold their tongues. But you can't stay, Gene, it isn't safe."

"I won't stay long, Governor, if there's any risk. But I can stay for a while, can't I? Where's Hortense?"

"Hortense isn't living at Comorn now."

"Not living at Comorn! Where is she? She hasn't gone back to Canada?"

"I wish to God she had," his father answered. "No, she's across the cove at Burnt Quarter, living with Joe Macie. You remember him?"

"What took her there?" Eugene persisted. "You didn't write me she'd married that fellow."

"She isn't married to him. I wish she was. It's a long story, Gene. I'll tell you all about it, but not now."

"You don't mean, Governor, that Hortense has thrown herself away on such a worthless fellow." There was a silence

and then Eugene said: "Poor old governor, we're all in the same boat now."

They walked on in silence for a time, then Eugene spoke again.

"How high the weeds are, Governor," he said. "You don't keep the place up as you did when I was here before."

"You'll find it all run down and changed," Brent answered. "Hamp and your grandmother let everything go to ruin, and since I came back I haven't had the money. I wish you'd stayed in New York, Gene."

"Nothing to do there, Governor. After I'd lost my job I couldn't find another, and the exchequer ran devilish low."

"At the worst it would have been better than this," his father said.

As they neared the house they heard the sound of wheels approaching from the opposite direction. The wheels stopped at the door.

"Who's that, I wonder," Brent said, pausing. He detained his son with his hand upon his arm. "You wait here, Gene, till I go in and see."

He pushed Eugene's bag, which he had carried, under a box bush, and charging Eugene to remain quiet and out of sight till he returned, entered the house by the river door and passed through the hall to the door on the opposite front. Here he paused at the head of the steps and looked down to see who was in the buggy which had stopped beside the mounting block on the neglected drive.

His mother and Hamp were helping some one to alight.

"Who is it, mother?" Brent asked from his place in the doorway. "Any one to see me?"

"It's Hortense," his mother replied. "She's done come home an' brought her baby."

"Her baby!" echoed Brent, incredulous and dismayed.

As he spoke his mother turned to ascend the steps. The light shining through the open doorway fell upon the bundle in her arms. Brent saw that she was carrying a very young child wrapped in a shawl, a baby evidently only two or three

days old. A great rage filled his heart, a great shame bowed his head. Harsh words rose to his lips, but before he could utter them he heard his daughter's voice.

"You go on home to Burnt Quarter," she was saying feebly to the colored boy, who had driven her to Comorn Hall. "And tell Mr. Macie that he needn't come here after me. I'm never going back. You tell him that I'm going to bring his nigger baby up among niggers, and that I'm going to teach it to curse every white man as I do. You'll remember to tell him just those words?"

"Yas'm, I'll remember," said the boy.

"Father, give him something for bringing me. He'll lose his place for doing it. But I told him you'd help him to find another."

Brent fumbled mechanically in his pocket for a coin.

"'Deed I don't want nothing, General, 'deed I don't. I'm a Black Crusader, I is," said the boy.

"Give it to him, father. Joe will discharge him. He told him not to let me have the buggy nor to drive me off the place or he'd shoot him. He won't do that, but he'll abuse him when he goes back. Where's the baby?" she asked faintly. "Won't some one help me in?" And then she burst into a passion of weeping. "He called it a nigger baby. He called it a nigger baby. His own baby. His own child, and I said I wished it was dead, but I don't. Oh, I don't, for it's all that I've got in the world. It's all! It's all!"

When they had taken Hortense to her room and had put her to bed, and had laid her baby beside her, Brent left his mother to watch over her and, assuring himself that no one was loitering about the house, went in search of Eugene.

As they entered the door together, a child's wail echoed through the gloomy house.

"What's that?" Eugene asked, starting.

"It's Hortense's baby. She's come home and brought her child. It was born only a day or two ago. I didn't know about it. You can't see your sister now. She mustn't talk.

She's overwrought. Driving this distance might have killed her. Perhaps you may see her to-morrow if things go well."

"I'll kill Joe Macie," Eugene cried fiercely. "I'll shoot him on sight, by God, I will! Why did Hortense throw herself away on him?"

"Come in here with me," his father said, opening the door of the library. "Come in and I'll tell you all I know about it. It's a bad business, Gene."

They sat down before the vacant hearth. Brent bowed his head upon his hands. Eugene laid his hand affectionately upon his father's shoulder.

"Don't give way, Governor," he said. "Don't give way."

"If I was a white man I reckon I'd know better what to do," Brent groaned. "But every time a crisis comes I've only got the brain and the courage of a nigger and I fail. I fail."

"That's because you hesitate and take half-way measures, because you trust others, and because you'd rather make people love you than fear you. Things look pretty black for us, Governor, but I never forget you're a big man, a great man, and don't you forget it, don't get discouraged and give up. Some way or other you're going to win out yet. I'm sure you are."

"Poor Hortense," groaned Brent, "poor Hortense. If I was a white man I'd kill Joe Macie, but I'm only a nigger."

From the time of Brent's return pressure had been brought to bear on Colonel Macie to induce him to foreclose the mortgage which he held on Comorn Hall.

"You ought to turn him out, Colonel," Mrs. Macie urged. "If you don't do it, now you've got the chance, people will say you're friendly to him. He hasn't paid his interest, you told me so yourself, and I want you to promise me you won't renew the mortgage. The way Joe's been behaving about that girl only makes matters worse. And now there's that disgusting child, and everybody talking about it. I want you to foreclose your mortgage and drive them out of here. We've had enough of Doctor Brent and all his family."

"You don't want to see the last of them a bit worse than I do," the carpetbagger answered, "but Doctor Brent's not a man I care to have trouble with if I can help it."

"I don't see what you're afraid of," snapped Miss Bessie. "He hasn't any claim on you."

"I don't say he has. But you know as well as I do that if he were to take another stand about John Brent he could make things very disagreeable for us."

"I don't see how," Mrs. Macie protested. "If he'd really known anything he'd have told it long ago. It would be rather late for him to come forward as John Brent's champion after all this time, and just because you happen to have a mortgage on his place. I don't believe that any one would listen to him."

"They might," persisted her more cautious husband. "He's hinted to me more than once that he could throw a good deal of light on John Brent's parentage. I've been hoping that something might happen to drive him away from here for good and all, then I could close in on Comorn without any open breach with him. But to turn him out now when he's practically ruined, and after this stupid affair of Joe's is likely to make him the bitterest kind of an enemy."

"I wouldn't be afraid of a nigger, if I were you," Miss Bessie sneered as she threaded her needle. "And remember this, the longer you wait for Comorn the less it's going to be worth when you get it. You know what Joe says about the condition the place is in. You know it just as well as I do. I'll lose all patience with you if you let this matter drift."

"There's a great deal in letting things drift sometimes if they're drifting in the right direction," the carpetbagger answered from the fulness of his long experience.

As he spoke, they heard the sound of a horse approaching at a sharp gallop, and going to the door, Colonel Macie opened it upon the living presence of Tiger seated on an overriden horse.

"Well?" demanded the colonel, with an unrecognizing stare which was also unapproving. "Don't you know you've been

riding that horse too hard? Where'd you come from, and what do you want?"

"General Brent, he sent me over from Comorn Hall to give you this letter. An' he told me I was to wait for an answer. I ain't been riding fast," said the boy as he leaned from the saddle and extended a letter to Colonel Macie who advanced to take it.

"You wait here, and I'll bring you the answer," said the colonel as he turned to enter the house.

"What's that man writing you about, I'd like to know?" Mrs. Macie demanded.

Colonel Macie opened the letter and read its brief contents to himself.

"He's written to ask if I can drive over to Comorn to see him," he said uneasily. "He doesn't say what about."

"The idea! The impudence! It's about your son and his daughter, or it's about extending the mortgage on Comorn Hall, or it's both. You certainly won't think of setting your foot in that nigger's house till you go to turn him out of it. What do you intend to say to him?"

"If you'd be quiet a moment perhaps I might think."

"You're not going to be weak enough to go over to Comorn just to please that nigger?" Mrs. Macie persisted. "I don't want people to see you driving in there. And once he got hold of you how do you know what he mightn't ask? And that daughter of his, and that baby. Well, one thing is certain; if you go, I'm going with you, and I'll let your friend, Doctor Brent, know pretty quickly just what he has to expect from me."

"You're letting that servant-girl in the kitchen know it now, and she'll probably save you the trouble of telling Doctor Brent," the exasperated carpetbagger retorted. "I'd better go since he's asked me. We don't want him coming here."

In the end, however, Colonel Macie was overruled by his wife. He was not so young as he had been, he began to confess to himself, and somehow Mrs. Macie had obtained the upper hand. Fearing to commit himself, and ill at ease in regard to

his son and Hortense Brent, he wrote an evasive letter, pleading ill health as an excuse for not making the long drive to Comorn, and asking Doctor Brent to write him fully upon whatever subject he wished to bring to his attention.

"If he won't come to me I'll go to him," Brent said, handing Colonel Macie's letter to Eugene. "It's too late to go to-day. But I'll go to-morrow."

Unlocking a drawer in his desk he drew out a large envelope which bulged with papers. A broad rubber band girdled the envelope. This he removed and selecting certain papers, one by one, passed them to Eugene to read.

"I want copies of some of these to show to Macie to-morrow," he said. "Will you help me to make them, Gene? I wouldn't trust the originals in his hands for a moment."

It rained heavily the next morning and Brent, hoping it might clear, put off the long drive to Brentwood until the afternoon. Eugene wandered restlessly about the house, trying to escape a sound which, coming from the room where his sister lay, seemed to penetrate to every nook and corner—the sound of a baby crying. Old Henrietta came and went, and once she brought the child to him in the drawing-room. But he would not look at it. At last he found an old waterproof of his father's hanging behind a door in the corridor, and putting it on he left the house and made his way along the path which led to the terraces. He had no purpose save to escape from the sound of the child's crying, and to indulge his bitter thoughts.

At an earlier hour a boat had put out from the plank and stake landing at Piccadilly. Ada Beverley was seated in the stern, while Murphy Bird sat amidships at the oars, and Salvadorie graced the prow. The inclemency of the weather was hailed by the occupants of the boat rather as an ally than as an inconvenience.

It was the anniversary of Colonel Beverley's death and Ada was on her way to the little burying-ground at Comorn to place flowers at the doors of the vault where her father and her father's fathers lay at rest.

"We won't see any one from the Hall while it's raining," Ada had said when her uncle protested against rowing to Comorn in such weather. "And that's the only thing I dread. Mr. Bird and Salvadorie are just as wet now as they can be. If Mr. Bird doesn't mind I don't, but I wouldn't want him to catch cold, nor Salvadorie," she added, doubt gathering in her eyes as she surveyed their water-soaked habiliments in the somewhat negative shelter of the leaky porch at Piccadilly.

"Don't you go for to stand onto no ceremony about me and Salvadorie," Mr. Bird had protested. "It ain't just what I call ladies' weather, but onto the other hand it's real warm, an' it would take a heap quicker child than Salvadorie to catch a cold a day like this. If it was my chest that ailed me I might feel different about it, but when a body's got trouble into the spine of their back weather ain't no manner of consequence. There ain't nothing a body can do but to take a little liniment inside and out."

"If you'll step this way, Murphy," said Colonel Washington from the door, "I'll see if I can't give you a little inside liniment that'll warm you up before you start."

"I'll run and get my mackintosh," laughed Ada, "while Mr. Bird takes his liniment, and then I'll meet him here."

"Well, so do," said Mr. Bird kindly as he followed Colonel Washington toward the dining-room.

"You'll go on up to the burying-ground with Miss Ada, Murphy?" the colonel asked as he poured out an old-fashioned drink of whisky for his tenant. "I don't more than half like the idea of her setting foot on Comorn now that Brent's there again. Of course the burying-ground belongs to them, and they've kept a right of way to it, but I hope Miss Ada won't see that man. I'm going to the Cross Roads to a vestry meeting so I won't be here when you get back. But I'll depend on you to bring Miss Ada home safe and sound."

An hour later Mr. Bird grounded his boat on the sandy beach of a little cove under the high Comorn shore, and carrying Ada's basket of flowers, led the way upward through a wooded ravine to the open hilltop.

Ada unlocked the iron gate of the burying-ground and followed by Murphy Bird and Salvadorie made her way through the tangle of sweetbrier and myrtle to the space before the old vault. The iron gates which closed the entrance were wrought and massive. Vines had twined about them, and a swirl of last year's autumn leaves still harbored at their base. As the bolt shot back they swung slowly and heavily upon their rusty hinges and Ada passed into the little ante-chamber and replaced the withered flowers with the fresh flowers she had brought.

Mr. Bird offered his assistance, but Ada declining, he retired to a little distance with Salvadorie and with head uncovered remained in an attitude of melancholy contemplation. The rain had now diminished to a misty drizzle.

"Say, pap," asked Salvadorie, watching with wide-eyed curiosity every movement Ada made; "say, pap, is Miss Ada's father buried into that place?"

"Yes, son, that's where they laid him when he was called away."

"Where was he called, pap?"

"To a better place than what this is, I reckon. Yes, sir, Colonel Beverley was a Christian gentleman an' nobody that knowed him but would of give a heap to have his chance of salvation."

"What's salvation, pap?"

"It's being saved to the Judgment Day. If a body's religious he's on the safe side, I reckon."

"Is grandpap religious, pap?"

"Your grandpap? I reckon so. He's a regular old ironside Baptist, that's what he is. He warms his hands to hell's fire onct a week, an' he'd cook his vittles onto hit if he could. I seen a heap of deep-water Christians in my time, an' I seen a heap of hard-shell Christians, an' I seen a heap of shouters an' a heap of groaners, but for a real down hell-for-certain Christian I ain't never seen none could touch your grandpap with a ten-foot pole. He ain't so much now 'cause he ain't the

strength left, but I reckon he'll be saved to the last trump if conviction of sin can save a body."

"Are you a Christian, pap?"

"Yes, sir, I reckon so, but I ain't so sure about my salvation as what I'd like to be. I got the call in childhood, as you might say, an' I sat right down under the cross of conviction an' I ain't moved since. It was a gentleman come through this-a-way into a buggy selling cucumber soap, an' he'd heard the call an' seen the Light. He stopped to our house for the night, an' I recollect he made a prayer over a piece of hog meat an' a dish of yams that would 'a' called a sinner to repentance if he'd been a-standing out onto the big road, you could of heard him that far off. I disremember the particular denomination he said he held by. He wrote it down onto a piece of paper, but it got mislaid. It was a grand religion, an' I've often wished I knowed the name of it. I'd like to tie up to it tighter. A body in feeble health like what I am ain't in no position to take chances onto the hereafter."

"If you was to die," said Salvadorie, "I reckon I'd miss you some."

"I wouldn't mind if you did," Mr. Bird admitted with melancholy satisfaction, "but I wouldn't wish to make it no inconvenience to you, son."

"Say, pap, do you reckon you like me real well like what you ought to like me?" asked the child.

"I reckon I do, Salvadorie. Yes, I reckon so. A body does a heap of liking sometimes and don't let on about it. I reckon it might be better if we was to let on more. I sat under a preacher once to Warsaw, an' he said, as I recollect, that the treasures of the Lord was right inside a body's heart, but that most all onto us kep' a-hoarding up, an' a-hoarding up our good feelings until we made prison bars out onto our own ribs an' never let a good word get in, or a good deed get out if we could help it, until we just perished into our own tracks, because we was that close-fisted we couldn't be liberal with the Lord's treasure, but was a-trying to keep it to pay taxes with into Kingdom Come."

"Is they taxes into Heaven, pap?" asked Salvadorie, with the natural anxiety of the prospective citizen.

"I ain't able for to say whether there is or whether there ain't. I ain't been there yet. But if there is it ain't got hell beat like what it ought to. No, sir, taxes, poll-tax an' road tax an' school tax and county tax, ain't none of 'em got no place into a bright hereafter like what I picture it. It keeps a body's pants pocket wore out just reaching for money to pay what a body owes into this world."

When Ada had completed her task she called to Mr. Bird and Salvadorie to come and see how beautiful the flowers looked. So for a little space the three stood together within the vestibule of the vault, the child awed by the solemnity of the place and its associations, the man remembering with gratitude the many years he had lived rent free on the lands of those who slept so close at hand, the girl compelled to silence by the tender memories of her father.

"Shall we go now?" she said at last.

The poor white, gently thrusting his son before him, left the vault, and in a moment Ada followed. The gates were closed and locked. Still Ada lingered. She gathered ivy and made a loose wreath for the Signer's tomb.

It was here that she had stood on the day she learned she was to leave her home. It was here that John Brent had spoken to her of his love. As she placed the wreath upon the great sarcophagus she observed a figure approaching from the direction of the Hall.

"We must go at once," she said. "I think that is Doctor Brent coming toward us now. I don't want to be forced to speak to him."

"No, it ain't Julius Cæsar," the poor white answered slowly, his eyes intent upon the approaching figure. "And it ain't Joe Macie neither. But it's some one I've seen afore—"

As he spoke the figure lifted its head and Eugene Brent looked at them in recognition. Smiling he raised his cap to Ada with deferential grace, bowed, and passed on in silence.

"So he's come back at last," said Mr. Bird.

CHAPTER L

A WHITE MAN'S ACT?

It was with some impatience that Doctor Brent awaited his son's return. Luncheon was on the table and the victoria stood before the door. Brent regarded the ghost of his once glittering carriage from the library window. A horse-blanket had been carelessly thrown on the seat to serve as a lap robe.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, Governor," Eugene said as he entered the room, his friendly smile illuminating his handsome face. "I've some news for you. I've been for a little walk about the place and I've seen Miss Ada Beverley leaving the old burying-ground."

"Did she see you?" Brent questioned anxiously.

"I'm afraid she did, Governor, and so did the man who was with her, the poor white who once lived on this place."

"Murphy Bird," said Brent. "It will be all over the county by to-morrow. There's certain to be trouble."

A little later Brent set out upon his drive to Brentwood. The rain was falling again heavily, but he disregarded it. He had purposely given Colonel Macie no intimation of his coming, but his approach being observed the door was opened by Miss Bessie.

"The colonel's gone out," she began, as Brent stepped from the carriage.

"Then I'll wait till he comes home," the great man answered. "He didn't find it convenient to visit me at Comorn so I've driven over to Brentwood. The boy can drive to the stable, I reckon."

"Yes, he'd better drive under the shed," said Miss Bessie, taken aback. "Colonel Macie's only gone out to the feed house. I'll send some one for him. Perhaps you'll walk in."

"Thank you," said Brent, and followed her into the drawing-room.

"If you'll wait here I'll send for Colonel Macie."

Left alone Brent glanced about him. As a boy he had often been in the room. Much was unchanged. There was a portrait of his old master hanging above the fireplace. As he stood looking up at the portrait the door behind him opened and Miss Bessie entered, followed by Colonel Macie.

"You've chosen a bad day for a long drive, Doctor," the carpetbagger said, extending his hand. "I was sorry I couldn't get over to Comorn, but I've not been very well, and my wife thought I'd better keep indoors for a while."

"I wouldn't have troubled you," Brent began, "if the matter that brings me had not been so urgent. I regret that I've been forced to intrude on Mrs. Macie."

"No intrusion at all," Colonel Macie hastened to say. "If Mrs. Macie will excuse us we can talk matters over."

As he spoke he cast an expressive glance toward the door, and smiled his little mean, hard-fisted smile.

"If you think I'm going to leave you alone with Doctor Brent," Miss Bessie flamed, "you're very much mistaken. If I went out of this room the first thing you'd do would be to give in about that mortgage. I'm not willing it should be extended, Doctor Brent. You know the last interest hasn't been paid, and from all I hear isn't likely to be, and I'm not willing."

"Will you be still?" demanded her husband. "Do leave me to settle matters with Doctor Brent in my own way."

"Let your wife stay, if she wishes, Colonel Macie. I have no objection to speaking before Mrs. Macie; only I warn her there are some things of which it is as well for those who need not know to remain in ignorance."

"I think I'll keep my seat," said Miss Bessie.

"Very well," said Brent. He turned to Colonel Macie. "There are two matters of which I have come to speak. The first concerns my daughter. The second relates to the mortgage on Comorn."

"I thought so," said Miss Bessie.

"First then, regarding Hortense, I've come to ask you to use whatever influence you may have with your son to induce him to marry my daughter."

"Never, with my consent," cried Miss Bessie with intense antagonism. "Joe's my stepson, remember, and I say he can't marry a girl with negro blood in her veins. It's out of the question."

Disregarding Miss Bessie entirely, Brent fixed his eyes upon Colonel Macie's face.

"It's got to be done," he said, with a threat in his tone. "And it's got to be done at once or I'll not answer for the consequences."

"What consequences?" asked Miss Bessie. "You can't come here threatening Colonel Macie, I can tell you that, or there may be consequences you won't like. We can threaten a little, too."

"I don't wish to threaten," Brent continued, still addressing himself to Colonel Macie. "I wish to settle this matter without threats. But I am determined your son shall acknowledge his child and shall marry my daughter."

"I don't care whether he acknowledges the child or not. But he shan't marry a nigger."

Brent rose from his seat and turned a terrible look upon the woman, a look of scorn, contempt, almost of malignant hate.

"He will marry my daughter, madam, or I'll drive you and your husband from this house and dispossess you of every acre of Brentwood! I'll strip you of everything you now hold of John Brent's, and I'll put him here in your place, and back in the place he held in the world till you forced him out of it for your greed."

Miss Bessie laughed a shrill and bitter laugh.

"If you turn us out of Brentwood what's to prevent us from moving into Comorn Hall?" she jeered.

"You'll never move into Comorn Hall, I'll see to that," he answered, frowning upon her, and then added, as though voicing some deep inner conviction: "Never, mark my words!"

"All this comes to just one thing," Colonel Macie interposed, addressing himself to Brent, while with an extended hand he sought to keep Miss Bessie silent. "You have come here because you claim my son is the father of your daughter's child, and you demand that I shall compel my son to marry your daughter. Let that pass. You must believe you have a pretty strong case if you think you can compel me to make my son take such a course. Let's come to facts. What do you know of Constance Brent's marriage, if she was married? How are you going to set about proving that John Brent was a legitimate child?"

"I don't suppose Doctor Brent will pretend that he was married to Cousin Constance," interposed Miss Bessie.

"No, I was not married to Miss Constance," Brent answered slowly, "but I have papers in my possession which will convince you that I make no idle threats."

"You speak of having papers. You have them with you?" Colonel Macie asked.

"I have brought copies. I don't carry the originals about with me." As he spoke he drew a heavy legal envelope from an inner pocket and handed it to Colonel Macie.

Colonel Macie took the envelope, but did not open it.

"And if my son married your daughter, say if they left here, and were married up north somewhere, would you give me the originals of these papers, and every other paper that bears upon this subject?"

Brent hesitated.

"And if I extended the time on the Comorn matter?"

Brent made a quick gesture.

"Don't mix that up with this. I'm thinking of my daughter now." He turned away to the window and looked out. Presently he turned again to Colonel Macie. "I'll promise this. If your son marries Hortense, I'll promise that while you and your wife live so far as I'm concerned you shall not be molested. But sometime in the future Miss Constance's son must know. I owe that much to him—" he added, looking up at the portrait which hung above the fireplace. "He was my

father. Even as a child I always knew I was Miss Constance's brother. Her boy can wait, but he must have justice done him in the end."

"The impudence!" cried Miss Bessie, furious. "The impudence to claim kin with Uncle Hampton and Cousin Constance. The idea! If he thinks he can come here to insult me in my own house, and try and foist John Brent upon us he'll soon see his mistake. And if John Brent really is Cousin Constance's legal heir it's no fault of ours he isn't enjoying her property. The colonel and I haven't done a single thing we need be ashamed of. Not a single thing. But we'll want some better proof than just a nigger's word. You may be sure of that."

Brent glanced to where Colonel Macie sat. He had opened the envelope and was examining the papers it contained.

"You'll put yourself in a pretty position, won't you," cried Miss Bessie, shifting her attack, "if you come out now as John Brent's champion? Your word wouldn't go far in a court of law in Virginia, I can tell you."

"It won't be a case of my word. There's proof enough without it."

"Proof! Forgeries you mean. If you'd had any proofs you'd have brought them fast enough."

Colonel Macie looked up from the papers in his hands.

"Joe is in Washington," he said. "When he gets back to-morrow I'll see that he comes round to Comorn to talk this matter over with you and your daughter. That will give me plenty of time to look these papers over carefully to-night. I won't promise anything, but likely enough Joe and your daughter can settle the matter between them. I can keep these papers, I suppose?"

"Yes, for to-night. Your son can bring them when he comes to-morrow. But once more I want to say there's only one settlement that's going to satisfy me. He's got to marry Hortense."

As he spoke he turned to leave the room.

"Joe'll never marry that girl, never," Miss Bessie cried, determined to have the last word. "I think if Colonel Macie extends the time for paying off the mortgage on Comorn Hall it's all you can expect. And don't forget you owe us six months' interest. You can't come dictating to people when you can't pay your honest debts, you can't—"

But Doctor Brent had gone.

"Of all the impudent, insolent niggers," began Miss Bessie as she saw the victoria leave her door. "You might as well have promised him that Joe would marry his daughter. You—"

"Will you be still," cried Colonel Macie, "or will you drive me out of the house with your insufferable nagging? Can't you see the position we're in? Haven't you common sense enough left to know that there is just one thing to be done? We must temporize with him. We must gain time. The man is certain to come to grief. The thing to do is to give him rope enough and he's sure to hang himself, and that will put an end to this bother. If you only had ten cents' worth of discretion in your entire character you would not make yourself so utterly ridiculous."

Miss Bessie burst into a violence of weeping.

The day following Doctor Brent's visit to Colonel Macie was warm and bright and beautiful.

Old Henrietta helped Hortense to dress, and assisted her to an easy chair near the window, from which she could look out over the fields, the woodlands and the gleaming river. Hortense held her baby in her arms. It was wasted and ill, its little face pinched with suffering.

"Your pa ain't seen the baby this morning, is he, honey?" asked the old woman as she busied herself straightening the covers on the bed and freshening the pillows.

"No, not to notice it. He came in while you were out of the room, but he never looked at it nor asked about it. He doesn't care whether it lives or dies." Hortense spoke indifferently, but tears came to her eyes as she regarded the helpless little bundle in her arms.

"Your pa can't bear Joe Macie, honey. I doan' reckon you can expect he'll like his child."

"He can't hate Joe more than I do now," the girl answered. "But that's no reason for wanting it to die." She bent over the child anxiously. "It would be better for it if it did die, I suppose. If it grows up it's only a nigger, and it will have to live all its life with niggers, or be hunted to death by a mob of its father's people, shot or lynched. I don't know why I want it to live, but I do, I do."

She gathered the child closer in her arms and wept over it. Through the open window she heard wheels grinding upon the gravel of the drive on the other front, but she paid no heed.

Doctor Brent went down the steps to meet Joe Macie, who was hitching his horse to a tree on the lawn.

"Fine day, General," the young man said, extending his hand. "I got back from Washington early this morning and my old man had me on the jump before I'd been five minutes at Burnt Quarter. Sent for me, so I hitched up and drove up to Brentwood. I've had a talk with him and he thought I'd better come and have a talk with you. How's Hortense and the kid?"

As Brent did not take the proffered hand, Joe Macie glanced at it, grinned and put it in his pocket.

"Hortense is sitting up to-day; she's better," Brent said, "but the baby doesn't thrive. If you care to see them you'll find them up-stairs."

"I'll run up a minute," said Joe Macie.

He found Hortense still seated by the window.

"You played me a pretty trick, didn't you?" he began. "If you'd stayed there quietly you wouldn't have stirred up all this mess. Your father's been over at Brentwood kicking up a hell of a row, and scaring the old man into a spasm. Do you know what they want me to do?" he demanded.

"No," the girl answered. "I didn't know father had gone to Brentwood. I'm sorry he went. There isn't anything I want you to do."

"Sure about that?" Joe asked suspiciously. "Sure you

didn't put him up to it. He said if I didn't marry you he'd turn my father out of Brentwood, by proving that John Brent was Miss Constance's legal heir. What do you know about it?"

"Nothing," said Hortense, drawing the baby a little closer to her breast. "I always thought father knew about John Brent. But he's never told me what he knew."

"I don't believe there's a word of truth in the whole business. He's trying to scare father into making me take you north and marry you. But it won't work. He can't bluff me. I don't see what difference the baby makes." He cast a curious glance at it, however.

Hortense drew the child closer, and covered its head with a fold of the light knitted shawl which was about her shoulders. It was her defense of it against his brutal curiosity.

"Here, let me see it," he said roughly.

But she would not.

"No. It's nothing to you. It isn't very well. I don't think it's going to live. It hasn't any name."

More to punish her than from any other desire he said:

"Oh, that doesn't matter. Just one nigger less, that's all. You can come back to Burnt Quarter on the old terms whenever you like, but I don't want any little niggers running round calling me papa. It looks bad. If it lives you can get Old Hetty to take care of it for you."

"Father! Eugene! Eugene! Father!" cried Hortense, who had risen as Joe Macie spoke and now was moving toward the door. "Father! Eugene! Eugene!" Her voice rose clearer and louder at each repetition of the words, "Father! Eugene!"

"Eugene?" Joe Macie demanded. "Your brother! Is he here?"

Brent and his son stood in the doorway.

"What's this mean?" asked Macie. "Is this some hell of a trap you damned niggers have set for me? What is it?"

Hortense, panting, clutched her father's coat. "Take him away," she gasped, "take him away and never, never let him

come here again. I hate him, hate him, hate him! He said, if it dies, it will be—just one nigger less. That's all, that's all. He didn't want any little niggers running round calling him papa—he—"

Old Henrietta came to the door.

"Hush, child, hush. They's about a dozen or twenty white men down by the front do', asking for you, Julius. They said they wanted to see you right away."

"You go, Governor," said Eugene. "See what they want. I'll take care of Mr. Macie. He won't insult Hortense again."

Doctor Brent detained Joe Macie for an instant.

"Don't leave this place until I've had a chance to talk to you," he said.

"I'll wait," Joe Macie answered. "But you might as well understand right now that I'm going to let you and the old man settle your own affairs. They don't concern me. I'm willing to take Hortense back, but I tell you right now I'll never marry her."

"That's final?" demanded Brent, trembling with rage.

"That's final," Joe Macie answered.

"Keep him till I get through with these people," Brent charged Eugene.

"Mr. Macie will be here when you want him, Governor," said Eugene. "We'll be waiting in the garden. You look after Hortense, grandmother," he added to Old Henrietta. "Don't leave her until father or I come back. Come on, Macie."

As Brent descended the worn flight of stone steps to the drive he saw a group of men standing upon the lawn. Seeing him they advanced a few paces and then paused. Then one man advanced a pace or two, and paused again. This man was Colonel Washington, the spokesman of the party.

"Well, gentleman?" asked Brent, pausing in his turn two or three paces from the group. "I don't suppose it's worth while to ask you to step inside."

"It isn't," said Colonel Washington. "We've come upon a disagreeable errand, Doctor Brent, and the sooner we get it over with the better." The colonel cleared his throat and

mopped his forehead. "There's a great deal I might say, but I reckon the less said the soonest mended." He paused, and a gleam of compunction lay in the depths of his honest eyes, and a feeling of sorrow touched his warm heart. "Too bad," he said, "too bad. It all comes to this: from the first day you set foot in Comorn things have gone wrong. They've gone wrong with us, and they've gone wrong with you. We're not here to blame you, nor to judge you, but we are here to warn you."

"To warn me," repeated Brent, lifting his head as he scented the battle.

"Yes, to warn you. It has come to our knowledge that your son is here. Common sense and common caution should have kept him away. His presence is intolerable to this community. It can't be endured, sir. It can't be endured another day. It isn't safe for him, and it isn't safe for us. We don't want mob violence in this county, but I tell you it can't be prevented if your son is allowed to remain at Comorn Hall."

"I neither admit nor deny that my son is here. This is my house, my property. I do not need to answer to any man for its inmates."

"Very good, very good," the colonel replied with some heat. "Of course you'll do as you think best. I tell you, we've come to warn you that you'd better leave this neighborhood at once, you and your son and all the members of your family. We've come to warn you to leave, and to tell you that you can't come back. We mean to be fair to you. Well, if you'll go peaceably, and go at once, we agree to buy Comorn Hall at the price you paid for it. That'll leave you something above Macie's mortgage to take you back north where you came from."

The colonel paused and waited for Doctor Brent's reply.

"I did not come from the North, originally, gentlemen. I came from a cabin yonder across the cove, a cabin on the old Brentwood place. You all know that. There isn't anything to take me to Canada now. I lived there, and I throve there, but if there's any spot in all the world that I've a right to it's

here on this land where I was a slave, or yonder at Brentwood where I was born. You can't send me away into exile any more than you can banish the problem I represent. I am a product of your soil and of your institutions, and most of my blood is yours. You can't buy back this place for I won't sell it to you. It's mine now, neglected and going to ruin, but it's mine and I'm going to keep it. Whatever the cost to me I will pay it. I have never received your charity. I shall never ask it. But your hate and contempt and injustice I have known to the full, as I now know your fear."

"I don't think we fear you," Colonel Washington said. "We make you a fair offer. To buy your place—we know you have tried to sell it—"

But Brent waved the words aside haughtily.

"I take a white man's privilege of changing my mind about that. When I sell Comorn Hall, if I ever sell it, I'll name my own price. I'll not be governed by your ideas of its value. But for the present at least I have no intention of leaving Comorn, and I have no intention of sending my son away if he is here."

"We know he is here," Colonel Washington said.

"My son has committed no crime. He has stood no trial. You have proved nothing against him in any of your courts of law. You have come here to warn me—but I warn you in my turn that if my son is molested I shall most certainly and most completely avail myself of the right to protect myself, my property and my family. If you gentlemen do not openly threaten me you at least warn me of the danger in which I stand. Before the day is done I shall telegraph the governor of Virginia and demand, on your evidence, the protection of the state troops. If this is refused me, I shall then have to take such steps as I deem necessary to protect myself, my family and my property. You will find that I am not so powerless and forgotten as you gentlemen seem to think me. You place a very strong weapon in my hands when you come here making threats. If there is violence it is you who will force it upon me. I'm a peaceful citizen, gentlemen, one man against

many. I am a law-abiding citizen, but I can defend myself if I must; in doing so I shall be within my moral and my legal rights. You make the laws and you control the courts. If you wish to bring an action against me, or against my son, under your laws and in your own courts, you will find us here ready to answer, but threats and bravado won't drive me out."

There was a murmur of protest from the group of men behind Colonel Washington.

"You have made up your mind to remain here and to let your son remain, regardless of the consequences?" asked the colonel.

"I have made up my mind to remain," Brent replied.

As he spoke, there came the sharp report of a revolver fired twice in quick succession, and then the sound of a single shot.

"Where's that?" cried Colonel Washington.

Before the men could move, oaths were heard and Joe Macie staggered round the corner of the house, leveling his revolver at some one as yet unseen who followed him. He fired, and as he did so stumbled a few paces forward and fell heavily against a tree trunk and slipped slowly to the earth.

Watt Beverley and Murphy Bird ran to the fallen man.

"I winged him that time," the young man gasped, "but he's got me good and plenty. I hope to hell he'll hang for this!"

As he spoke Eugene Brent appeared from behind the house, revolver in hand. He came forward slowly and paused about twenty feet from where Joe Macie lay, supported in the arms of Murphy Bird.

"I surrender, gentlemen," he said, and threw down his weapon.

"No, no," cried Brent, trying to push his son away. "You shan't give yourself up to them."

"I ran from them once, Governor. I don't want to run from them again." As he spoke his face twisted in a wry smile.

"You're wounded," Brent exclaimed, bending over him. "Eugene! Eugene!"

As he spoke Hortense appeared in the doorway with her baby in her arms.

"Go back, Hortense," her father cried, but she disregarded him and running to where Joe Macie lay, knelt on the grass beside him.

"Joe! Joe! It's Hortense. Don't you know me, Joe?"

With a last effort he raised himself and pushed her from him.

"Curse you and curse every damned nigger," he whispered, and sank back upon the broad shoulder of the poor white, dead.

There was an ominous murmur and all eyes were fixed upon Eugene. But Colonel Washington was at his side.

"Gentlemen," said the colonel firmly, "this young man is in my custody, and as a magistrate I call upon you to assist me. Watt Beverley, Murphy Bird, and you, Bush, I appoint you my deputies, and I charge you with his safety."

CHAPTER LI

RESTITUTION

The days which followed the shooting of Joe Macie were filled with terrible anxiety and sickening dread for Brent.

Great excitement prevailed throughout the counties of the Northern Neck. Threats of lynching could be heard upon all sides; not only was Eugene's life in danger, but Brent's as well. There was even wild talk of burning Comorn to the ground that it might never again afford a refuge for the mulatto or any of his breed.

The suspicion and dislike with which the Macies had always been regarded, and the general belief that Joe Macie had not only invited but deserved his fate, together with the announcement that a special term of court would be convened to mete out speedy justice, tended to allay the first wild surge of rage, and enabled the leading men of the community to preserve Northmoreland from the disgrace of mob violence.

Brent had accompanied Eugene to the court-house, sharing his cell that he might the better care for his wounded arm, and it was not until late the following day, after the militia had arrived to guard the jail, that he surrendered his place to face the task of marshaling a defense.

It was night when he reached Comorn. The lamps had not been lighted, but the white moonlight falling through the windows checkered the floor and broke the gloom with silver patches.

Hortense, hearing his step, called to him from above.

"Is that you, father? Is Gene safe?"

"Yes, Gene's safe," he answered as he mounted the stairs. "The troops came before I left the court-house."

"Take care you doan' trip over nothing till I finds a match

an' makes a light," Old Hetty warned him as she fumbled among the medicine bottles and ornaments upon the mantle shelf. Then as the flame brightened in the shelter of her palms she added, "We ain't showed no light since the trouble yesterday. 'Deed we didn't know who might be a-prowling an' a-spying round. Old Jim Washington he sent Murphy Bird to tell us we ain't nothing to fear. But I doan' trus' none of them white devils, So I took an' stood the ax behind the do' las' night to be ready if they come. Did Hamp let you in?"

"No," Brent said, "I haven't seen Hamp. The door stood open."

"Then I reckon he must of went out to the barn. The fool nigger," she muttered, "standing the do' open like we was living among friends in peaceful times."

"Tell me about Gene," Hortense entreated. She had half risen in the bed. "What will they do to Gene? You can save him, father, can't you?"

"I'm going to do my best," Brent answered. "We'll see, we'll see."

Something of hopelessness in his tone brought a sudden terror into Hortense's eyes.

"Gene," she moaned, "Gene. My poor, poor Gene." Turning her face away she sank back upon her pillows. "Did he blame me, father?" she asked. "It was all my fault. I was reckless and I didn't care what happened to me. I don't care now. But Gene—my handsome Gene—Gene who loves life so—Oh, father, find some way to save him, find some way—"

A great pity for his daughter filled Brent's heart.

"Come, be brave, Hortense," he said. "Gene doesn't blame you. All the blame rests on my shoulders, none on yours, none on his. Nothing shall be left undone that can be done to help him. Presently I'm going to ask your Uncle Hamp to row me out so that I can catch the first up-river steamer. The annual conclave of the Black Crusaders is being held in Washington. I'm going to see Adriance and his sister—I made them rich, they've got to help me now. I'm going to

see Bishop Comfort, too. I'm going to ask them to lay Gene's case before the League. I'm going to claim the League's protection for him. We've got to be prepared to appeal his case from court to court. The League's got money and the League's got power, and I'll need both to help me to gain time and save Eugene. There's talk already of convening a special term of court. What they really want is to give Gene a Jim Crow trial and railroad him to the scaffold."

"'Deed I ain't looking for no justice into no white man's court," Old Hetty interposed. "'Deed I'd get help an' bust the jail do' some dark night, that's what I'd do if it was left to me."

"We'll do that if it must be done," Brent answered grimly. "But first I'm going to try the law. There's a time for everything."

Turning to the bed he lifted Hortense's baby in his arms and bore it to the light. He saw its hold on life was very slight. For a little while he strove to put aside all other thoughts, and, recalling his half-forgotten skill, became the physician again, charging Hortense and his mother with instructions as to the child's care during his absence.

Later as he was preparing to leave the house with Hamp his mother drew him back.

"So you ain't got no money, Julius, to hire no lawyers with?" she asked. Her eyes were on the albino's face as Brent replied.

"None. If I can't get help in Washington I won't know which way to turn. I'm stripped to the last penny."

"You hears that, Hamp? You hears what Julius says?" Old Hetty asked.

It was approaching midnight when Hamp, lantern in hand, returned from his errand on the river. His mother, now dominated by a single purpose, met him at the door.

"I watched the light put out from the landing, an' I seen the steamer slow down for Julius to come on board, so he's gone. But mebbly he won't come home no richer than he went," she said as she led the way into the library. "'Deed,

I doan' reckon that man Adriance will put his hand very deep into his pocket, an' it won't do Julius no good to humble himself to ask no favors of that Dandridge woman, nor of that nigger bishop neither. The pack that pulls you down doan' turn to fight for you. They been against him all along." She paused. "Ain't you thought of them bills that's in Lorella's coffin?"

"Yes, I reckon I been thinking of them," Hamp owned uneasily.

"They ain't doing no good where they is," she urged. "'Deed they ain't. An' if the grave damp gets into the jar they'll only rot an' waste away."

"I'd feel a heap easier if they was off my conscience," Hamp admitted. "I ain't so sure as I'd like to be they won't stand between me an' my salvation at the Judgment Day."

"If we was to give them back to Julius they ain't gwine stand into nobody's way. Them bills is the very bills he give Miss Jinny. They was his bills, an' if he gets 'em back it'll be between him an' Miss Jinny an' their God, an' you can wash an' wipe yo' hands of it. Doan' you reckon we better go after them to-night?"

"To-night," Hamp repeated dubiously. "'Deed I doan' want to go near no graveyard at this time of night."

"It's better than letting white folks know your business, ain't it?" she demanded impatiently. "If you wants to help yo' brother when he's in trouble doan' hang back because it's night-time; get the pick an' shovel an' come on."

"I reckon I ought to do it," Hamp agreed. "'Deed, I reckon so. An' there's Lorella. 'Deed I'd like to see how she's a-laying a waiting for sun-up on the Judgment Day. Lorella always set a heap of store by Judgment Day."

"'Deed if she didn't, bless God," his mother cried. "I done 'spect she's a-laying thar a-smiling up at Jesus an' a-waiting, an' a-watching. 'Come down, Lord Jesus,' she's a-saying. 'Come on down quick, Lord Jesus, an' lift me up to Heaven.'"

"I'd like to make sure that she was resting quiet," Hamp

repeated, his tone revealing the anxiety which had long preyed upon him.

"There ain't no way to tell but by opening the casket," Hetty said, quick to take advantage of his doubt. "An' while you got the lid off I can reach my hand in an' get them bills from under her. You go on out to the woodshed for the pick an' shovel, an' I'll slip up an' tell Hortense there's somebody sick to the Mablys' an' they've sent after me. I'll tell her I won't be gone more'n an hour."

A little later Hamp and his mother were making their way toward the burying-ground.

"I done forgot there was a moon," Old Hetty said, looking up at the brilliant half circle which hung above the tops of the low second-growth pines. "It'll be gone soon, but we've got the lantern if we need it."

They walked on in heavy silence until they came within sight of Comorn Old Gate. Suddenly Hamp paused and threw down the implements he carried.

"What you stopping here for?" his mother demanded.

"I ain't gwine a step further," he announced stubbornly.

"You pick up them tools an' come on like what you said you would. Come on," she insisted.

"'Deed I doan' want to go on closter to that graveyard nohow. 'Deed I don't. I'se gwine back."

"Is you skeered of a graveyard at yo' age," his mother jeered. "Gimme hold of that shovel, gimme hold of that pick. Gwine on back if you wants to, but I'se a-gwine on." As she spoke she moved forward.

Hamp stood irresolute a moment and then followed.

In silence they advanced along the path. The night was full of sounds and omens; from far across the cove came the long lugubrious baying of a hound. An owl hooted. Now and again some prowling denizen of the forest skurried off, rustling the leaves mysteriously.

Still in the shadow of the woods Old Henrietta paused.

"I'se gwine on out to the open road," she said. "'Tain't

likely no one will be passing so late, but if I keeps watch dis-a-way an' dat-a-way we'se certain to be sure."

"Hold on," Hamp protested. "Ain't that a light a-shining through the trees? Doan' you hear something? Listen! What's that?"

"I doan' hear nothing. 'Deed I doan' see no light."

"Come on over dis-a-way. There, doan' you see it a-shining between the tree trunks. Hark! You heard that, didn't you?"

"Seems like I did hear something. What do you reckon it is?"

They listened in silence for a moment.

"There," said Hamp, "there it is again."

This time the sound of a blunt instrument striking on gravel could be distinctly heard.

"Seems like they was digging a grave," Old Hetty muttered. "But 'tain't no work for this time of the night. Let's move up closer an' mebbly we can make out who they is an' what they're after."

They crept forward noiselessly to the edge of the clearing and peered through the network of pine branches which separated them from the burying-ground. By the light of a lantern which rested on a stump two men and a woman could be seen. The woman, her back toward them, stood a little removed from her companions. One of the men was digging in the grave. The other was resting on his shovel. The faces of both were in shadow. Suddenly Old Hetty felt her arm clutched in a grip of iron.

"They're at Lorella's grave," Hamp whispered.

As he spoke a low hollow sound came to them from the graveyard. The man who was digging had struck the wooden box which held the coffin.

Old Hetty thrust the branches aside.

"Who's there?" she called imperiously. "Who is you-all? What you-all doing here at this time of night meddling with a corpee that doan' belong to you?"

As she spoke the digger scrambled hastily out of the grave, and the man with the shovel drew back and joined the woman.

"Fo' God we ain't here to do no harm," protested the man who had left the grave. "Fo' God we-all only come out here 'cause Mignonette she kep' a-coaxing an' a-begging, till we just had to come. You know me, Mrs. Brent, you knows me, Hamp. I'se Rance Williams. We was just a-digging Lorella up so's Mignonette could get her waist back. Fo' God that was the onliest reason. That's Mignonette standing over there. You just ask Uncle Robert Jackson if it ain't so. He ain't going to tell you no lie."

"'Deed it's the truth," said Uncle Robert, coming forward. "Mignonette she can't rest easy in her mind while Lorella's corpse's got on that waist she give her."

"What Mignonette want with that waist after all this time?" Old Hetty demanded, still suspicious. "This doan' look right to me nohow, Brother Jackson, 'deed it doan'."

"You tell them, Mignonette," Rance urged. "'Deed, Mrs. Brent, you ain't forgot what folks said at the burying? That crazy old Mably woman kep' a-telling Mignonette that waist would keep a-calling an' a-drawing till it drawed her to her grave. Ain't that so, Mignonette? You ask that old Mably woman if it ain't so. Mignonette she never thought nothing about it the first year we was married, but after that she done began to pine an' fade, an' dat waist began a-calling an' a-calling her. An' the grave it kep' a-drawing an' a-drawing her till she most lost her senses. I don't want no grave a-calling me. 'Deed I don't, an' you don't neither. You ask Mignonette, she'll tell you. I'se willing to quit right here an' fill up the grave, but you-all jus' look at Mignonette."

Old Hetty took up the lantern and surveyed the girl who now stood near the edge of the grave, convulsed as though by some fit or spasm, her hands and arms twitching, her head rocking from side to side.

"I wants my waist, I wants my waist! It's a-drawing me. It's a-calling me," she wailed. "Get it off her or I'll be dead an' gone by morning. 'Deed I will, 'deed I will. I

ain't had no peace for months an' months. No peace, no peace. I ain't had no sleep for nights an' nights. No sleep, no sleep," she moaned. "I ain't eat nothing for three days. Get it off her or I'll loose my senses, 'deed I will. I got another waist to put on to her; mama helped me choose it at old man Hesketh's store." As she spoke she held out something wrapped in paper. "Oh, Lord God, can't you hurry up, can't you hurry up? I'se got such a misery in my head. It hurts like it was going to bust." She sank down writhing in anguish on the mound of sand and gravel. "Doan' you cover her up till I gets my waist off her back," she cried, "or I'll be dead by morning."

"Lay hold with Rance and lift the coffin out," Old Hetty said to Hamp.

The coffin was raised from the grave and placed beside the heap of earth. Then Old Hetty spoke again.

"You-all gwine back a piece an' let her father see her first. No," she added, as Rance hesitated a few steps away. "Gwine on further back. Her father doan' want you-all overlooking him."

As Rance and Uncle Robert obeyed, leading Mignonette between them, Old Hetty whispered to Hamp:

"Quick, now, prize up the lid an' I'll get the jar out an' hide it. Then Mignonette can have her waist an' welcome."

Inserting the edge of the spade beneath the rim of the coffin lid Hamp exerted his strength. In another instant the coffin was opened and Old Hetty had thrust her hand within. There was a moment's pause while her fingers groped for what they sought. Then she lifted an anxious face to Hamp's.

"It ain't there," she whispered. "I done put it right under her neck. But it's gone."

Taking the lantern from the stump she threw the light upon the stark and rigid form within the coffin.

"Oh, Lord God A'mighty," she cried, stricken with sudden horror. "She's got it in her hand. She's moved! She's moved!"

"Moved!" Hamp echoed. "The dead don't move till Judgment Day." He dropped the spade and stepping forward stared down upon Lorella. Then with a wild cry he put his hands before his face as though to shut away the awful thing which he had seen.

"You buried her alive!" he screamed. "You buried her alive! Oh, God have mercy! God have mercy! Lorella, does you hear me, child? Honey, does you hear yo' papa? They told me you was dead, an' when I wasn't by they put you in the ground an' piled the dirt an' gravel on yo' head. Oh, God have mercy! God have mercy!"

His mother, fearful that the others might approach, attempted to take the jar from the stiffened fingers, but Hamp thrust her back.

"Let loose," he cried fiercely. "Let loose, I tells you! Them bills has put a curse on us. Oh, Lord God, bring her to life! Punish me, Lord God, an' bring her back to life. I was the thief! I was the thief!"

As he poured out a flood of incoherent supplication two figures, attracted by the cries, approached and stood within the circle of the light. Old Hetty turned and found herself confronted by Watt Beverley and Colonel Washington.

"What's this? What's this? What's the matter here?" the old autocrat demanded. "What's Hamp Sam raving about? Who's been opening Lorella's grave without authority? This sort of thing can't be permitted. It won't do."

As he spoke he lifted the lantern and threw the light upon the ghastly figure in the coffin.

"They done buried her alive," screamed the albino, tearing at his hair. "They done buried Lorella alive to hide the bills I done stole from Miss Jinny. I done grabbed them on the street in Baltimo'. For God's sake take them back to Miss Jinny, an' mebbby then Lorella'll rest quiet in her grave. Oh, Lord God! Lord God, have mercy!"

"Give me the money, Hamp," the colonel said, his tone, a moment before stern and aloof, softened to gentleness by

Hamp's wild agony. "Give it to me and I'll take it to Miss Jinny for you. Lorella don't want it now."

Obediently the albino drew the glass jar from the stiffened fingers and gave it to Colonel Washington.

"Did any one but you have a part in robbing Miss Jinny?" the colonel asked. But Hamp was past coherent speech. "What do you know of all this, Hetty?" the colonel said, turning to the old negress.

"Me, Colonel, me? Why, bless God, I doan' know nothing. If Hamp knowed how them bills come to be there it's more than I knowed, 'deed it is." Then volubly protesting her innocence, she told how she and her son had come upon Rance Williams and Uncle Robert opening the grave to recover Mignonette's waist.

Rance and Uncle Robert came forward with Mignonette. The colonel consenting, the waist was taken from the body of the dead girl and the new one put upon it. The coffin was closed and lowered into the grave.

When the last shovelful of gravel had been cast upon the little mound Colonel Washington and all left the place, all but the tall albino, who remained to guard the grave. Before morning dawned the man was raving mad.

CHAPTER LII

BRENT APPEALS TO HIS PEOPLE

"We've got it back!" shouted the colonel as his carriage stopped before the door of Piccadilly. "Everybody get up! We've got it back! Hurray for Cousin Jinny! We've got her money back!"

It was at this moment that Miss Page's head appeared at Miss Page's window. Colonel Washington always insisted that it was thrust straight through the cotton mosquito netting which had been placed there to resist the attacks of what the master of Piccadilly frequently termed "summer-time Yankees." However this might be, Miss Page's voice now broke upon such fragments of the stillness as had survived the colonel's summons.

"Cousin James! Cousin James!" she cried, "Have they lynched those poor unfortunate deluded niggers? Is the house on fire? Or what in conscience's name's the matter?"

"Where's Cousin Jinny? Where's Ada. Where's Agnes?" shouted the colonel. "Bring them down-stairs this minute—turn out everybody! We've got it back! Hamp Sam stole it. We found them digging up Lorella. She had it all the time in a fruit jar in her hand. But we've got it back! We've got it back."

In the dim moonlight the colonel was distinctly seen to cut a "pigeon's wing" before his very door, and flirt his coat tails in the most surprising manner.

"My, isn't it awful," wailed Miss Page. "Something's happened, and his mind's affected. Boys," she called, "keep your mother away from the window. Don't let her look. Bush, you'd better put your clothes on and go for Doctor Carniel right off. Oh, Watt, when was he taken?"

But Ada had detected the unmistakable note of triumph in

her uncle's voice. Snatching a wrapper from her cupboard she fled down the stairs.

"Oh, Uncle Jim," she gasped, "Uncle Jim. You've got back mother's money? Watt? It's true! It's true!"

"It's true," Watt answered. "We've got the whole five thousand dollars. Every penny but the interest, and that doesn't matter."

"'Deed it's true," repeated the colonel. "I don't reckon I'd get so excited if it wasn't. Cousin Page needn't get Doctor Carniel out of bed on my account."

"Agnes! Agnes!" Ada's voice rose above the general turmoil. "Tell mother it is true. Uncle Jim and Watt have found the money she lost in Baltimore."

Then, after flinging her arms about her uncle and her brother, she fled back to her mother's room, as swiftly as she had come, to confirm the splendid news. From sheer exuberance of spirits and perfect satisfaction with the universe and all created things, the colonel gave the rebel yell.

The steamer which had slowed down off Comorn to take Doctor Brent on board reached Washington at six o'clock the following morning. Brent had paced the deck all night. Two hours later as Bishop Comfort and his wife were seated at breakfast with their guests, Adriance and Mamie Ann, who had come on for the conclave, the talk turned upon the shooting at Comorn.

"No, Gene Brent hasn't got a chance on earth," Adriance was saying as he laid aside the morning paper which told of the excited state of feeling in Northmoreland County.

"He was a fool ever to go back to Comorn after that girl shot herself," said the bishop. "His father ought to have known better if he didn't."

"It's a wonder they didn't lynch them both before the troops got there," said Mamie Ann indifferently. "Only a column," she added, glancing at the paper. "They don't seem to have given the affair much space, do they?"

"No," the bishop acquiesced with unctuous complacency.

"No, the old man's lost his grip on the newspapers and on the public too. He used to think he could hit the United States in the face with a sledge-hammer any time he liked and get its undivided attention; used to make capital out of most anything that came along; but justifying a murder is too big a contract even for Brother Brent to handle. It's mighty fortunate we turned them both out of the League before this happened. He and his son have ceased to be an issue with us."

As the bishop spoke the telephone rang in the next room.

"Don't you move, General," said Mrs. Comfort, rising. "I'll go see who it is and I'll call you if it's important. You all go right on eating," she added with hospitable consideration as she left the room. In a moment she returned, a look of anxiety upon her face.

"Well?" asked her husband. "Who was it?"

"Doctor Brent's in Washington."

"What," cried the bishop. "Who said so? It wasn't Brent on the telephone?"

"No, it was Brother Fletcher. He says he passed Doctor Brent on the street a little while ago. He thought you ought to know."

"He's certain it was Brent?" the bishop asked uneasily.

As he spoke the door-bell tinkled in the basement.

"I wonder," the bishop thought aloud.

"What!" cried Sister Comfort. "That man dare to show himself at your door after the way he's acted. I should think not."

"Hush," said the bishop sharply. "Listen."

All sat in silence. The maid was heard passing along the hall. The outer door was opened. Presently the maid retraced her steps and entered the dining-room.

"It's Doctor Brent to see General Comfort," she announced.

"I thought so," said the bishop.

"You won't see him?" Sister Comfort protested.

"The impudence," exclaimed Mamie Ann. "Certainly the general won't see him."

"No, don't see him, General," Adriance urged. "You can't tell what might come of it."

"He doesn't know we're here?" Mamie Ann asked the maid with some anxiety. "No? Then don't tell him."

The bishop pondered a moment. Then he addressed the maid:

"You'd better just say to Doctor Brent that General Comfort is very much engaged at present, and regrets that he can't see him. If he'll come back to-morrow—"

"You'll not see him then," his wife insisted.

"Of course not," the good man answered, evidently annoyed by his wife's simplicity. "I'm leaving for New York after the meeting to-night. But it's better to put him off than to offend him, when it's just as easy." He again addressed himself to the maid. "Tell Doctor Brent General Comfort is sorry he can't see him to-day. But that he'll be glad to give him half an hour to-morrow morning. Then I can leave word I was called away unexpectedly," he added in happy afterthought.

The maid left the room. There was evidently a parley at the door. The maid returned.

"He says he can't wait until to-morrow. He says he must see you to-day. He won't take no for an answer. It's about his son."

"As if that made any difference," Mamie Ann began.

The bishop rose and closed the door which had been left ajar. Then he said:

"I think I'd better send word that I'll see him at two o'clock this afternoon." Then after the maid had left the room he added, "I'll take mighty good care to be away when he comes." Resuming his seat he listened uneasily for the outer door to close.

Promptly at two o'clock Brent rang the bishop's bell again. General Comfort had gone out, the maid said in answer to his question.

'Deed she didn't know when he'd be back. No. He hadn't left no message. 'Deed she reckoned General Comfort had

his hands so full with committee meetings and the delegates to the conclave that he couldn't be bothered listening to folks' troubles. She didn't reckon it would do any good to come back again, and the door was closed with small ceremony but considerable decision.

Deeply humiliated, but still determined, Brent next sought an interview with Adriance at the local headquarters of the League, where he had learned that the ex-editor was in conference with members of the finance committee. But Adriance sent word by his secretary that he was occupied and could not see Doctor Brent.

By inquiry the great man learned that Mamie Ann was lending her presence to a meeting of the woman's auxiliary of the League at the house of a well-known negro attorney. Thither Brent made his way, sending in a penciled note to ask if Mrs. Dandridge would see him for a few moments on a matter concerning the life of his son.

The servant brought back the message; Mrs. Dandridge was engaged with the ladies, and could not be disturbed. A sound of distant and derisive laughter followed him from the house. When Brent tried in other quarters he was met with the same evasions and excuses. It was evident that Adriance and Bishop Comfort had warned the leaders, all of whom were inaccessible to him.

But Brent was no longer downcast. A new purpose, a new hope, was stirring in his brain. Deposed from his high office, cast out, denied even the right of simple membership in the great League his genius had created, he would, nevertheless, go to his people with a last appeal; an appeal for justice for the negro in the white man's court. Facing the conclave, he would brush aside all opposition, he would rally his old adherents to his standard, and, before the night had passed, he would regain his lost power, and with it unlimited means for Eugene's defense.

Yes, he would assemble behind him the entire menacing force of his race in America. If need be he would declare a

strike so colossal that industry should cease in every southern state, that every black hand should be idle from the Potomac to the Rio Grande. He'd rouse the land, he'd lay an ax at the root of the nation, but his boy should have a white man's chance.

He would enlist the newspapers. He'd start his name booming across the land again. He'd make Eugene's trial a test case of the unwritten law. No white man in the South, he told himself, would be sentenced to death for shooting a man who had wronged and then refused to marry his sister. Why, then, should a negro suffer death for such an act? His boy should be tried for shooting Joe Macie, he should not be convicted just because Polly Beckford had killed herself one winter's night at Avalon. Upon this foundation he would base Eugene's defense.

He clenched his hands and vowed he'd show them yet that he was J. C. Brent of Comorn Hall. Usurpers, time-servers, sycophants, they might turn him away from their doors with insulting messages, they might put him off with excuses, but it should not avail them. They'd find they'd have to reckon yet with J. C. Brent.

And so, strong in his new hope, he waited impatiently for the coming of the night.

In the evening papers he found comments on his presence in the city, but they had little to add to the previous reports from Northmoreland Court-House. More troops had arrived to strengthen the guard about the jail. Joe Macie's funeral had occasioned no fresh outburst of public indignation.

Relieved that all was quiet in Virginia, Brent made his way toward the somber building in which the conclave of the Black Crusaders was being held.

Even before the hour set for the opening exercises the hall was packed. Flags decorated the platform. The sable silken banner of the Black Crusaders, with its crimson cross, its edges fringed heavily with gold, hung from its gilded standard near the armchair reserved for the head of the great order.

To the right and to the left seats were reserved for the higher officials of the League. Beyond these sat the delegates, while at the back of the platform the vast choir was massed.

Before the platform, facing it, were more than two thousand members of the League; the negroes of the city filling the remaining seats and crowding the aisles and galleries.

A table before the platform was already surrounded by a group of newspaper men who had been sent to report the meeting.

Upon a signal, a fanfare of trumpets, the choir, the delegates and the entire audience rose and stood as the general of the order entered, surrounded by the officers of the League as by a court. Across the bishop's ample breast was a wide sash of purple denoting his supreme authority. Advancing he took his seat in the chair of state reserved for him in the very center of the platform.

Those who entered with the bishop took their places on his right and left, their various ranks indicated by the different colors of the sashes which they wore, and by the badges of office pinned upon their breasts. Following the bishop and the officials who surrounded him came Sister Comfort and Sister Dandridge, leading the officers of the woman's auxiliary, both wearing broad sashes of crimson and white to denote their rank.

The meeting opened with the solemn ritual of the League; this concluded, there was a second blare of trumpets and all once more rose and stood as the choir took up the splendid marching chant of the Black Crusaders.

Adjusting the purple scarf upon his breast Bishop Comfort leaned toward Adriance and whispered:

"Well, I reckon we've seen the last of old man Brent to-day. Likely as not they'll ride him on a rail or tar and feather him when he gets back to Northmoreland County."

As the bishop spoke a movement at the back of the platform attracted the attention of those in the front seats. A way was being made for some one who was advancing slowly through the crowd of delegates toward the circle of the elect.

Adriance was the first in the group about Bishop Comfort to realize that something unusual was taking place. Glancing backward, his eyes met those of his old leader, who, with uplifted head, imperiously thrusting aside all who sought to stay him, was steadily making his way forward as the chanting rose and fell. All eyes in the vast auditorium were now fixed in mingled fear and admiration upon the imposing figure, which never halted until it paused at the very front of the platform and surveyed the sea of faces lifted in questioning.

To most of those who saw Brent from beyond the platform he was already a tradition. His career was ended. It was an anachronism to see the living man, so dominant, controlled and masterful, so vividly momentary. What errand, they wondered, brought him back across the dead line of his life.

As the chanting died several of the chief personages about the bishop, recovering their self-possession, approached Brent, protesting against his presence, and attempted to lead him away. But the great man waved them back haughtily.

"No, gentlemen, it's useless. You can not intimidate me, and you can not silence me," he said, his voice resonant and clear. "You had your opportunity to hear me privately; you were too occupied to listen to me then. Blame yourselves if I encroach upon your time to-night."

Turning from those about him, he again faced the audience. He spoke deliberately.

"I have been deposed from the chief office of this League. I have been cast out from membership in this brotherhood which I created. I have been accused of crimes against you, crimes against my race; of theft, malfeasance; of having betrayed you to your enemies for my own profit. Those who have accused me know best how false their accusations are. To them I say the day of their reckoning draws near, the hour of their accounting is at hand. Let them look to that hour. To-night another errand brings me. I come to tell you of my son. You know the story. Because he dared avenge a wrong a white man put upon his sister he is to be tried be-

fore a white judge, by a white jury, in a white man's court. And I, a negro, have come to you, negroes like myself, because I mean my boy shall have a white man's chance before this white tribunal which presumes to pass upon his guilt or innocence."

"Don't you worry. He'll get justice!" a voice jeered from behind Brent on the platform.

Wheeling, Brent faced the speaker.

"Justice!" he cried. "What do you mean by justice? What kind of justice? Jim Crow injustice or white justice? Which would you ask if your son stood in my son's place?" His voice grew threatening. "It is my son to-day who stands in peril of his life, it may be yours to-morrow."

He paused, passing his hand across his brow, conscious that he no longer spoke with his old fluency, yet none the less determined to be heard.

"Say that I robbed you, say that I sold you out to politicians: even if these monstrous lies were true, would they make my son's claim upon you less valid than it is, or lessen your own peril and the peril of our race? Aided by you I will make his trial a test of the unwritten law with a negro the defendant at the bar. Alone I can accomplish little, with your aid everything. Time must be gained. The ablest lawyers in the land must be secured. We must fight on from court to court if need be. It is for this that I have come to you, my people, and his people, for strength, and means, to save my son!"

"That's it! I knew it! He's come to pass the hat!" the voice jeered from behind Brent on the platform.

Again Brent wheeled and faced the speaker.

"And if I have?" he asked. "In my day I have filled the pockets of some of those about me here to-night. I have been accused of plundering this League, of robbing my people to enrich myself. It has been said that I sequestered millions. If this were true would I be begging now for means to save my son? I say to you unless you aid me he must face his judges without a single advocate to speak one word in his defense,

for I am destitute! We know how many pieces of silver the supreme traitor of all time received as the price of his infamy." As he spoke he strode toward Adriance and Bishop Comfort, menacing them with his uplifted hand. "I do not know how many thousand pieces of gold were paid for my betrayal. But there are those about me here to-night who could tell us if they would!"

Turning once more toward the sea of faces he cried:

"Beware the foes of your own household. No power on earth but that within the race itself can ever hold you back from your full heritage. For myself I stand erect amid the ruin of my fortunes, traitor is not written on my brow, nor in my heart. I look with confidence toward the day when time shall clear my name of the reproach these foes of their race have sought to cast upon me! Peace! Peace!" he thundered as some strove to answer him. "To-night my son, and not their treachery, concerns me most."

He ceased to speak. A deep silence, like an eddy on the surface of still water, crossed all the spaces from him to the last listeners crushed against the distant walls. Then he spoke again:

"If I have ever rendered any service to my race, if any of my better purposes bore fruit, if any of the faith I once inspired was justified, hear me and help me now to save my son. Say with me that he shall not die a shameful death, say that he shall have a white man's chance, say to me that when I leave this hall to-night southern justice shall be placed on trial before a jury of ten millions of my people! Say that never again in the history of this nation shall there be one interpretation of the law for the white man and another interpretation for the black man. Say that henceforth and forever there shall be equal justice throughout all the land, for negro and for white, say this and you have saved my son. Say to me these things, give me this hope, and when our fight is won you shall have peace from me, I'll trouble you no more. The flag these hands unfurled shall pass, leading the march of progress, borne high by stronger hands than mine beyond

my sight. I will lay down the leadership I never yet renounced, and trouble you no more."

A great wave of emotion swept the hall, men moved restlessly in their seats, or nodded acquiescence to their neighbors. A woman sobbed aloud. The moment was critical in the extreme.

As Brent paused to mark the effect of his appeal a young man who had entered soon after he began speaking rose from his seat at the reporters' table and advancing to the edge of the platform, handed a slip of paper up to Adriance.

Adriance glanced at the paper, glanced at Brent, then carefully reread the paper. This done, he leaned forward and whispered in Bishop Comfort's ear. The bishop nodded assent. Rising Adriance advanced a step to the front of the platform and addressed himself rather to the audience than to Brent.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, a supercilious smile taking the place of the look of keen anxiety his face had worn while Brent was speaking. "With your kind permission I will ask Doctor Brent to confirm or to deny an interesting report which has just reached the city from Weyanoke Cross Roads. The report, I am informed, was received too late for publication in the afternoon papers, but you will probably read it in your papers to-morrow morning."

He then read in a clear voice a circumstantial account of the exhuming of the body of Lorella Williams, and the finding and recovery of the five one-thousand-dollar bills which had been stolen from Mrs. Beverley.

"In some quarters," the article concluded, "it is believed that Doctor Brent himself can be directly connected with the theft. If so he will be arrested if he ventures back to Northmoreland County."

Adriance, as he finished reading, smiled significantly, then he added:

"I reckon Brother Brent's folks were just trying to raise a little money to defend Gene Brent. But it's the first time I ever heard of passing the hat to a corpse."

A coarse laugh went up, in which Bishop Comfort and those about him joined heartily. The touch of ridicule had broken the spell which Brent had cast upon his hearers.

Brent caught the paper from Adriance's hand.

"Lies!" he cried. "All lies!"

"No, no," came several voices from the reporters' table. "It's straight goods, Doctor. They've got the money back all right. There's no mistake about it."

"With all that money in the family Brother Brent ought to be able to finance his son's trial," the bishop jeered. "I can't see the need to pass the hat, gentlemen, 'deed I can't."

"I reckon he's got the money he looted from the bank tucked up with some corpse or other," Mamie Ann laughed. "He'd better go home," she added. "He isn't doing any good here. Can't some of you gentlemen push him off the platform?"

"That's right! That's right! Put him out! Put him out!" came from a hundred throats.

A hand was laid roughly upon Brent's shoulder. He turned and saw Adriance close at his side. Mamie Ann, her eyes dilated, venom upon her tongue, pressed forward behind her brother.

"Put him out!" she cried. "Put the old fool out! Let him go home and rave! Nobody wants to listen to him here!"

"Move on!" Adriance said, thrusting Brent before him.

With sudden fury Brent flung Adriance off, striking him full across the face with his cane. As Adriance recoiled Brent came face to face with Mamie Ann. For a moment he fixed a withering glance upon her and seemed about to speak. Then shook his head and held his peace. In another instant many hands had seized him and he was being half dragged, half thrust, across the platform, to be hissed and hooted from the hall, and finally to be expelled from the building.

Once beyond the doors which he had entered so confidently Brent slunk away, limping from one shadowy street to one more shadowed and remote. His injured knee had been wrenched as he left the platform and it caused him pain. He

valued with effort. He had sustained a great shock and he called from it nothing.

"Here," he said of himself a hundred times, "here," he was with nothing but his weakness and his distress.

Beginning with nothing more serious, his weakness and distress for him and he made his way to the station and took a late train for Baltimore. In Baltimore, he thought, he might find a few, at least, of his old adherents. Finding traces of his great purpose, he was ready now to submit to any sacrifice.

But the solemn news from Comorn had preceded him. The morning papers printed detailed accounts of his expulsion from Comorn Hall and he found himself in serious danger among his former friends and followers.

Even to the few who still believed in his honesty he represented a lost cause. He had become a thing to shun and fear. He was like some great ship slowly foundering and was struggling to keep the engines going and to master the waves, but doomed inevitably. Caution then chose to avoid the water which must soon show the wreck.

When Brent left Baltimore he had barely the money to pay his passage in the steamer which anchored at Weyanoke Landing.

He was not permitted to travel as before.

"You'd better keep down below with the other niggers," the captain told him when he passed him on his upper deck. "We've got ladies on board, and I don't reckon I want a lynching on this trip."

At Weyanoke Landing Brent looked in vain for the victoria from the Hall. Then he remembered that he had found no means of apprising Hortense of the time of his return. Even if she had known it was doubtful if there was any one at Comorn she could have sent to meet the steamer.

Once on shore he made an effort to secure a team to take him to the court-house. He wanted to see Eugene, later he could go to Comorn. But the first negro whom he approached flung back an indifferent "Deed I ain't gwine up dat-a-way. Better ask somebody dat is," and clambered into his wagon

and drove off. Of the next Brent first asked for news of his daughter.

"'Deed I doan' know how she is. 'Deed I ain't heard nothing about her nohow. No. 'Tain't possible for me to carry you to the cote-house. I got a load of drain tile on the wharf to carry out to Captain Fauntleroy's."

Another fruitless inquiry forced him to realize that he was being shunned by all his people.

With drooping shoulders and bowed head and leaning heavily upon his cane, he made his way along the dusty road which led from the Landing to the Cross Roads. He made what haste he could. He wanted to see Eugene, to assure himself of his safety, and he wanted to see Gus Wyatt too. The editor was commonwealth's attorney now. Perhaps he could turn that fact to some advantage, perhaps gain some delay as the price of his silence concerning their business relations in the past. If he could only gain a little time he was certain he could save Eugene. Time was the thing he needed. Though he had been rebuffed in Washington and Baltimore he was not beaten yet, he told himself, no, they hadn't beaten J. C. Brent, not yet, not yet.

As he passed the Cross Roads he saw Colonel Washington's familiar equipage hitched to a swinging bough in the rectory grounds. There was the usual group of loungers on the steps of Mr. Hesketh's store.

Beyond the village two negroes lolling in a buggy passed him. But they did not stop, nor offer him the customary "lift." A little way behind the buggy three white men of the poorer class loitered along the sandy road. They had detached themselves from the group before Mr. Hesketh's store soon after Brent turned into the road which led toward the court-house.

Brent, who never once looked back, was unaware that he was followed. Presently as he neared a bend where the road entered a stretch of woodland he heard the brisk approach of wheels and a carriage drew up sharply almost at his elbow.

"Going back to the court-house, I reckon?" Colonel Wash-

ington asked as he brought his horses to a standstill. "Well, get in! Get in! No use to walk when you can ride. You've business up there and I reckon you're in a hurry, and I'll be dogged if I can pass you on the road like this. No, sir, not when I remember how you came by that bad knee. Get in. Get in." He added kindly as Brent paused, surprise and hesitation plainly visible upon his countenance, "You'll need your strength for all you've got ahead of you. You're too lame for such a walk."

"I tried to get a buggy at the wharf," Brent said as he took his place at Colonel Washington's side, "but I couldn't find one. I couldn't even learn how my daughter is. My own people seem to be frightened away."

"I stopped at Comorn on my way up to the Cross Roads," the colonel answered as his chariot resumed its progress, "and I'm going to stop there again on my way back to Piccadilly to get Miss Page. I hear your daughter's pretty sick. Miss Ada and Miss Agnes went over yesterday to see what they could do, and I left Miss Page there when I came up the road this morning. Your mother does the best she can, but she's not the hand she used to be. And Hamp's gone. Had to be sent away. He's at the jail at the court-house now waiting to be transferred to the state asylum for the criminal insane. Stark mad. Stark mad. Raving about Lorella. Who can wonder? Who can wonder? And Tiger's gone too; put out for parts unknown. The colored people all seemed afraid to go near Comorn, so the ladies went."

Brent bent his head in understanding, but did not trust himself to speak.

"Of course you've heard that Mrs. Beverley has got her money back?"

"Yes, I'm glad of that," said Brent. "I don't suppose I need to tell you that I knew nothing of the theft. The knowledge of it came as a great blow to me. It defeated my efforts for my son in Washington. I could make no headway after the ridicule and shame it brought upon me."

"At first," the colonel continued, "an effort was made in

certain quarters to connect you with the theft. But there was no evidence to go on. The better element among us agreed it looked too much like persecution. And so they had to drop it. But your mother's talk has been contradictory, to say the least. I'm afraid there's no doubt she was pretty deep in the whole business. But Mrs. Beverley wouldn't hear to her arrest while your daughter needed her so much at Comorn. So I had a talk with Wyatt and she has not been molested."

"I would be glad," Brent said after a pause, "if Mrs. Beverley might know that I am grateful." He broke off and tears came to his eyes. "I wish I'd learned the power there is in kindness long ago."

They drove on in silence for a time.

"Things look pretty bad," Brent said at last.

"Bad, yes, yes," the colonel answered, staring ahead. "So bad it only makes them worse for asking."

"And my son?" Brent questioned, a sudden terror gripping at his heart. "The troops—they're still on duty at the jail? Gene's safe?"

"Yes, yes, he's safe," the colonel hastened to reassure him. "The troops won't leave till the trial is over and things quiet down again. I reckon you haven't heard, but a special term of court has been convened to try your son. His case comes up to-morrow. You haven't got back a day too soon."

"To-morrow!" Brent echoed. "Not to-morrow! Gene to be tried for his life to-morrow—and no defense prepared!"

"It had to be," Colonel Washington answered with decision, "or no amount of troops the governor could send would have held the people quiet. It was try him or lynch him. We had to take our choice. But everything's been regular. Your son's rights have not been forgotten. In your absence Judge Fairfield called for a volunteer from the local bar to defend him. Young John Brent was the only man who came forward."

"John Brent," the master of Comorn repeated incredulously, "John Brent offered to defend my son?"

"Yes, he made the offer, and he has been appointed by the

court. He's had next to no experience. This will be his first serious case before a jury. I reckon you'd better have a talk with him as soon as you've seen your son. He's at the court-house now. There's a heap of things you'll want to go over with him before the trial begins."

"John Brent. John Brent to defend my son," Brent said again. After a pause he asked himself, "I wonder why he took the case? I wonder why?"

"There's been a lot of wondering," the colonel said. "Some say it will ruin his career. Most folks think so. Not a few tried to dissuade him from it. But some one had to take the case for the credit of the county. He's made a public statement, explaining his position in the matter, and giving notice that since the case is in his hands the prisoner can depend upon his absolute fidelity, that he means to do his utmost in his defense. And he will do it, too. He's perfectly outspoken in saying he thinks your son was justified in shooting young Macie under the circumstances. And that, he says, is the only question that should come before the court."

"He has said that publicly?" Brent asked.

"Yes. That explains how he came to volunteer. But you or your son are free to dismiss him and bring in any lawyer you want. A good many of John Brent's friends would be glad if you wouldn't accept his services."

"I'm penniless," Brent answered. "I failed in my efforts to raise money in Washington, and I failed in Baltimore. I have nothing with which to retain or to pay counsel. If my son is satisfied I am. I'll see Mr. Brent after I have seen my son."

As they approached the court-house many surprised glances followed the master of Piccadilly and his unwonted companion. When Colonel Washington drew rein before the jail the doctor and Mrs. Carniel were just alighting from their buggy at the door of the building in which John Brent had his office.

"I'll be here to take you down the Neck any time you're ready," the colonel said as he hitched his horse to a

locust post. Then as Brent disappeared within the jail he crossed the dusty street and joined his friends.

"Has John Brent's foolishness turned everybody's head?" Doctor Carniel demanded with the license of long intimacy. "I can't say which surprised me most, John's agreeing to defend the son, or your driving the father into town."

"Don't take it so hard," said the colonel blandly. "You'd have done the same thing in my place. I was talking to Mr. Braxton in his study when we saw old Julius Cæsar go by on foot. That was enough to take us to the window. Then we noticed three poor whites from up in the Forest, who'd been loafing on Mr. Hesketh's steps, start after him. It didn't look right, so I got under way. When I passed them I was pretty certain I hadn't made any mistake. Maybe they didn't mean mischief, but I felt a heap safer with Julius Cæsar on the seat beside me. Poor devil! He's mighty near the end of his rope every way, but I can't help liking the fight he's making for his son. He can't win, and I think he knows it, but he won't quit fighting. Well! Well! I reckon I'm too old-fashioned, but somehow I can't forget they're our own niggers now that they're in trouble, 'deed I can't. I reckon I was raised that way. I haven't any patience with their notions, but I don't like to see them in real trouble, 'deed I don't. He's gone in to see his son, and then, after he's spoken to his brother Hamp, he'll want to see John Brent. When he's through with his talk I'll drive him down to Comorn. These are ticklish times, and there's no use taking any chances. Going up to see John Brent? Well, I reckon I'd better go up with you and worry him a little, too."

"The doctor doesn't want to worry John about his course and I don't," Mrs. Carniel protested. "But has any one stopped to think of Bessie Blackburn's tongue, and of all the use she'll make of this?"

CHAPTER LIII

THE COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENSE

"You made a great fight, Governor," Eugene said when his father told him of his failure in Washington. "But there never was a chance that you'd succeed. And with the trial to-morrow there wouldn't have been time to do much anyway."

"Are you satisfied to have John Brent defend you?" his father asked.

"Yes, I'm satisfied," Eugene answered. "When I heard of it I thought they'd chosen him because he'd do the least to help me, but after I'd talked with him I saw it wasn't so. He'll do his best. The longer I talked to him the better I liked him. Governor," he paused, an odd, half-quizzical expression lighting his handsome face, "it's his first real case. He'll lose it, of course, but I wish a fee went with it."

"He'll get his fee," Brent answered, nodding his head, as though his conviction on that point was very deep and strong. "He'll get his fee, don't you worry about that. If he gets you off, or even if the jury disagrees, he'll get the biggest fee he'll ever get in all his life."

"But if he can't save me, Governor, what then?"

"We won't talk about that till the trial is over. There is one thing I've been thinking of," he added thoughtfully. "John Brent's a marked man in this community. Every word he says will be listened to by the jury for his sake as much as for yours, and before this trial is over he'll be a bigger man than he is now. I'm hoping more than I dared to hope a little while ago. I'm certain you'll be acquitted. Any white man would be in your place," he urged.

"A white man, maybe, but there's no chance for me. The jury isn't going to care about Joe Macie, but they can't forget

he was a white man and that I'm a nigger, as they call me, and they can't forget poor little Polly Beckford. I don't blame them. I wouldn't in their place. Don't stake your hopes on an acquittal. Poor old governor," he added as he looked in Brent's stricken face, "good old governor. I'd like to live well enough, life suited me, but don't think that I'm afraid of anything that's—ahead of me. It's no joke, I know, but I'm going to see it through as well as any damned white man in the South. You shan't have any cause to be ashamed of me."

"Gene! Gene!" Brent cried in anguish. "Don't talk so. Don't lose hope. I'm going to save you yet. I blame myself for all of this. I blame myself alone."

"Poor old governor, good old governor," Eugene said tenderly. "Fight them to a finish, if it's any comfort to you, but I know, I know."

An hour later Doctor Brent found himself in John Brent's office, a plain deal table between them.

"I have seen my son, I have just come from the jail," he began, taking the chair John offered him. "He's told me of the talk he had with you, and of the confidence he has in your ability and your sincerity. He said he'd like to be sure you should receive some fee in excess of that allowed you by the court." He paused, waiting for John's reply.

"I want no fee," John said deliberately. "Neither from the court nor from your son. I took his case because, in this particular instance, my sympathy is with him. I took it, too, because I thought the honor of the state required that he should have more than a nominal defense. He had Wyatt pitted against him, and the Macies, and, in your absence, there was no one to whom he could turn. Then the decision for an immediate trial, while feeling was at white heat, placed him, in my judgment, at a terrible disadvantage. Judge Fairfield's call for a volunteer took me by surprise. I acted on impulse. Perhaps I overrated my ability. I mean to do my utmost, but I want no fee."

"Nevertheless," said Brent, "you shall be paid. Save my

son's life and I'll put you back at Brentwood where you belong. Yes, I'll do that and more."

But John Brent only frowned and shook his head. A look of sternness crossed his face.

"You needn't tempt me with promises," he answered coldly. "I mean to do my best. I can't do more. I'd rather keep my purpose single. I don't want to think of myself and my own interests when I'm thinking of your son and all that is at stake for him. And I don't know, after all that's happened, that I'd want any good thing from your hands."

Brent bowed, but made no answer.

"I have already been at Comorn," John went on. "And I believe I have a pretty clear understanding of the case. But I want to go over everything with you, point by point, to be certain that nothing essential has escaped me. Then the witnesses must be considered, and the make-up of the jury."

"I'm here to help in any way I can," Brent said.

Presently they were deep in the consideration of the evidence John should require to establish the few simple points upon which he meant to base the defense.

"The human side of the story is the one I want to make the jurors see. The love of your son for his sister. The long pursuit of your daughter by Joe Macie. The advantage he took of your absence and the conditions at Comorn. His bad treatment of her when he had finally induced her to join him at Burnt Quarter. His faithlessness even to the bad bargain he had offered her. His cruelty in regard to the child. Then I want to make the jury realize her brother's natural anger—an anger any decent man would feel, and so lead up to the quarrel, taking their understanding, their sympathy, if possible, with him all the way through. If I can succeed in making them see this whole story as I see it they may let him off with a prison sentence. Long or short, it doesn't matter. In time public feeling will die down, and, if the sentence is too heavy, there'll always be the hope of an appeal, or of a pardon. That's what I want to show, and that's what I hope to gain. So far as Wyatt is concerned I understand

that he will present the case to the jury as a plain murder, and demand a verdict accordingly. I am told he is certain of securing a conviction." He paused. "Maybe I didn't fully realize the great responsibility that I assumed; maybe, after all, you'd better ask the court to assign another lawyer to defend him. It may be taking awful chances to depend on me alone."

"No," Brent answered. He thought a moment and then added deliberately: "No. I told you that my son was satisfied. Since I have spoken with you I am satisfied. We shall not ask the court to assign any other counsel to defend him." He rose. "I want to see Eugene again for a moment, and then I must go down to Comorn." He hesitated as though there was still something on his mind. "I had a certain business connection with Mr. Wyatt at one time. In fact, I owned an interest in his paper which I acquired through Colonel Macie before I came south. Afterward I loaned him money. Still later, when he became a candidate for commonwealth's attorney, Colonel Macie bought out my interests for him. I had thought I might perhaps induce Mr. Wyatt to delay the trial; or help Gene in some way if I kept our personal relations in the background."

"I don't think I would raise such an issue," John replied. "The further we keep from all such matters the better, just as I mean to make no mention of the tragedy at Avalon. I think your silence may help your son more than any revelations you could make."

"You can bear it in mind, however," Doctor Brent suggested as he turned toward the door. At the door he stopped again. "I don't suppose that any influence which I might still be able to exert on Colonel Macie could benefit my son?"

John shook his head.

"I don't think so. It all rests with the verdict of the jury now. Unless the prosecution raises some point which we have not foreseen I'd keep all those matters in the background."

"But if the prosecution should raise some unexpected issue?" Brent demanded.

"Then," said John, "we'd have to use whatever means we could to meet it."

"I won't spare Wyatt, and I won't spare Macie, no, and I won't spare myself if it comes to an issue," Brent said somberly. "You won't forget that my son's life is at stake."

"Not for one moment," John Brent answered. "Still I'm sure we should keep to the plain issue."

"Very well," Brent said. "But I'll come prepared for any move they make."

When he reached Comorn the sense of his failure had preceded him. A pall seemed to hang over the place. That night, he spent much time searching among old papers, and sat long over his desk preparing a statement of certain matters to which he wished to call John Brent's attention before court opened in the morning.

His tread was heavy as he made his way slowly up the great staircase to his room above, and when he slept his sleep was full of troubled dreams. Twice he started up calling "Molly! Molly! don't you hear me, Molly?" to the wife who had long been gone. Then, sick at heart, almost delirious with anxiety, he lay tossing restlessly, until, moved by some strange impulse, some lingering and last touch of his departed youth, he rose and creeping to his mother's room crouched at her bedside.

Old Hetty was awake, or wakened at his entrance, and reached a withered hand to fondle his.

"God, ain't it awful!" she moaned, echoing his fear and panic. "Julius, you was mos' a king, an' yet they'll hang your boy an' you can't stop them! Oh, honey, we's jus' niggers, jus' niggers, that's all we is. You'se jus' my little yellow boy Julius, Mammy Hetty's little yellow boy Julius. Oh, great God A'mighty, why did them meddling Yankees ever come a-blundering down dis-a-way to set us niggers free! You'se mos' white, Julius, why can't you fink an' ack like a white man, honey? Your pa he were a white man, an' your grandpa' he were a white man too; can't you fink an' ack like you was white, too, honey? Oh, Lord God A'mighty, this

is what comes of niggers thinking they is white! Doan' nobody talk to me no mo' about the master's lash, no, never no mo'! It done kep' us from the hangman's gallows tree, that's what it done, an' dar ain't nuffin to save us now! Hamp's gone, an' Gene's in peril, an' Hortense she'll never lift her head again, an' ruin's come on everything you lay yo' hands to!"

Presently her mood changed. Then she said:

"I dreamt about the old master night afore last. But I ain't told no one. Old master he done come to me in my dream, an' he take me by the arm, an' he shake me so, jus' like dis, and he say: 'What you bring them little niggers to, Hetty, with your goings-on?' he say. 'Take care you doan' bring them to the gallows tree, take care of dat,' he say, 'take care of dat.' An' then he pat yo' curly head, an' Hamp's, an' he say, 'Po' little niggers, po' little niggers. What'll become of you po' little niggers if the Yankees ever have their way an' set you free?' Then he done shake his head an' I see right through his coat the log barn an' the corn-crib back of him, an' the hog pen, an' the tobacco-field, an' the strip of pine woods beyond. Old master was done gone, an' the sunshine of the old time was gone too, an' it was night, and I were an old nigger woman a-tossing an' a-turning on my bed in a big house whar I'd no business to be 'cept to 'tend on white folks, or to tidy up the rooms."

"I wish to God we'd never been set free," Brent groaned. "Gene wouldn't be where he is if times were like they used to be."

"The old times is gone, honey, an' they ain't gwine to come back never no mo'! The day dawn it brings a new day every time."

"The dawn," Brent echoed.

Still clasping his mother's hand in his he crouched beside her bed and together they watched and waited for the coming of the day.

For hours before the trial opened the heavy dust rose steadily in clouds on all the roads which led toward the county

seat. Even Grandpa Bird could not remember a day when the village or the court room had been so thronged.

"I declare I don't know where the people come from!" cried the patriarch as he edged his way within. "I didn't know as there was so many strangers into all creation. He's drawed a crowd, yes, sir, he's drawed a crowd. I declare he has."

"Can you see, son?" Murphy Bird asked as he lifted Salvadore and seated him upon his shoulder.

Several newspaper men had arrived to report the trial, while an unusual number of influential men from the adjacent counties had gathered to lend their moral support to the proceedings. Of the mere idle whites hundreds swarmed in the village which wore the look of a high holiday. Negroes, too, were present in great numbers, but held themselves aloof even from the lower orders of the whites: there was no intermingling of the races. The excitement, though suppressed, was none the less intense. The court-house, as well as the jail, was heavily guarded by state troops.

When Judge Fairfield entered and took his place upon the bench the court room was packed to suffocation. Colonel Macie sat well forward near the commonwealth attorney's table. Mrs. Macie was at his side, conspicuous in her heavy mourning.

Doctor Brent and Hortense were permitted to take their places beside the prisoner, who had entered with the sheriff. Eugene, his arm still supported by a sling, though pale, was smiling and confident.

John Brent was at the prisoner's side.

Not far away Doctor Carniel and Mrs. Carniel sat with Colonel Washington, Douglas Hamilton and several of the Washington boys.

In selecting the jury Commonwealth's Attorney Wyatt adopted a patronizing and overbearing tone toward the young counsel for the defense, which contrasted with John's quiet attention to his duties. He grew impatient when John challenged several prospective jurors, who were well known to be hostile either to Doctor Brent or to Eugene.

"We want to try this case," he blustered. "Your Honor, I protest against these needless delays."

The jury, when its selection had been completed, was composed entirely of white men, Captain Fauntleroy, Doctor Bibby and Mr. Hesketh being first selected. The remaining jurors came from remote parts of the county where Doctor Brent and his son were known only by name. Among these were several well-to-do farmers, a Methodist preacher and a blacksmith, all sound men, who very fairly represented the spirit of the community. Doctor Bibby was chosen foreman.

After the noon recess Commonwealth's Attorney Wyatt began at once the prosecution's statement charging Eugene Brent with the murder of Joseph Macie, Junior, on the afternoon of the twenty-ninth of August, at Comorn Hall.

After describing, in the most picturesque and emotional language at his command, how young Macie, upright and clear of conscience, unafraid and unsuspecting, had driven from Burnt Quarter to Comorn Hall, thus placing himself in the power of the Brents, he continued:

"I will show that this was a particularly cold-blooded, sordid and unprovoked murder; a crime without the slightest provocation, palliation, or excuse, a crime resulting from a quarrel which had its origin solely in the business relations of the fathers of those two young men, and from no other reason whatsoever." As the Honorable Gus paused impressively, nursing his period, Doctor Brent glanced quickly toward the young lawyer who was to defend his son. Their eyes met in understanding.

It was evident the commonwealth's attorney would seek by all means to divest the prisoner of any human justification for his act. His words seemed also to convey a challenge; at least to indicate that an attack was expected, the force of which was to be discounted and forestalled. Signing to Doctor Brent to fix his attention on Gus Wyatt, John waited developments.

"I will show," the Honorable Gus began again, well aware that his unexpected line of attack had made its impression, "I will show that there was a reason for this quarrel, a money

reason, that there was a mortgage hanging over Comorn Hall. I will prove that letters had passed between Doctor Brent and Colonel Macie in regard to this mortgage, and that Doctor Brent had visited Brentwood to make a personal appeal to Colonel Macie in regard to its renewal. I will show that Colonel Macie, knowing Doctor Brent to be a virtual bankrupt, as well as a disturbing element in this community, declined to renew or extend the mortgage, and that from this business contention with the father arose the quarrel with the son which had the fatal termination we all know!"

Young Macie had, in his opinion, merely visited Comorn to learn when he might expect his servant, or housekeeper, to return to Burnt Quarter. The Brents, father and son, had opened the question of the Comorn mortgage, the young mulatto seconding his father in an attempt to delay the foreclosure proceedings, and a quarrel had ensued. When Doctor Brent had been called away to meet the deputation of gentlemen which visited Comorn on the fatal afternoon to request him for the last time to leave the community, the prisoner had wilfully pressed his quarrel on young Macie and had shot him.

As the Honorable Gus concluded his remarks, John Brent hastily scribbled a few lines upon a sheet of paper, folded the paper, and passed it to Doctor Brent. He had written: "If Wyatt can succeed in convincing the jury that the quarrel grew out of business relations he will remove all sympathy from your son and secure a verdict of murder in the first degree. Can I rely upon your evidence to prevent it?"

Brent read the words carefully. Then penciled his reply across the bottom of the page.

"Yes, I can prevent it. When the time comes lead up to my relations with Wyatt and Macie. Macie had every cause to wish to conciliate me. I held him in the hollow of my hand."

It was best, John thought, as he rose to address the court, to depend upon the evidence itself to develop those aspects of the

case which he most desired to impress upon the jury. His own interpretation he would hold in reserve until his final effort, when he would take advantage of any revelations Doctor Brent might make.

He contented himself, therefore, with a brief review of the circumstances which had, in his opinion, led up to the tragedy, dwelling on facts at sharp variance with those brought forward by the commonwealth's attorney; facts relating chiefly to what he had termed in his talk with Brent the human side of the story.

The first witnesses called by the prosecution briefly and clearly established the fact of the shooting of Joe Macie by Eugene Brent. Then the commonwealth's attorney called Colonel Macie to the stand to establish the motive for the crime. Gus Wyatt's manner was now deferential: he treated the witness with the greatest consideration.

The examination brought out the story of how Doctor Brent had approached the witness some years before to secure a loan on the Comorn property. How the witness had loaned him fifteen thousand dollars. How Brent in the time of his affluence had neglected to take up the mortgage. How after the failure of his bank Doctor Brent had written to the witness to ask a renewal of the loan. How since his return to Comorn Doctor Brent had visited the witness at Brentwood to press for an extension of the time, which, for various reasons, the witness had felt constrained to refuse.

A grim smile was observed upon the lips of Doctor Brent as the witness concluded his testimony and left the stand.

Mrs. Macie was next called and testified that she had been present when Doctor Brent visited Brentwood the day before the murder. Yes, she had heard him use violent and threatening language. She was not surprised when she heard of the shooting. She had felt anxious and had urged her stepson to keep away from Comorn Hall.

Hortense Brent next took the stand. To those in the court room the pallor of her countenance seemed only to increase

her extraordinary beauty. Questioned by Wyatt, she admitted that she had been present when her brother quarreled with Macie.

Wyatt next sought by every means in his power to force Hortense to admit that her position at Burnt Quarter had been merely that of a servant, and that while there she had received the ordinary wages of a servant.

But Hortense was firm in her denial. She had not been a servant at Burnt Quarter, she said, nor had she ever received wages, or compensation of any kind, from Joe Macie during the time that she had lived under his roof. She had only gone to Burnt Quarter when conditions in her own home had become intolerable.

Try as he would, the commonwealth's attorney was unable to confuse the witness or to shake her testimony upon this all-important point.

Not a little dissatisfaction was felt when the prosecution concluded its examination of witnesses without having called Doctor Brent to the stand.

John Brent's first act was to recall Hortense. In answer to his clear and sympathetic questions Hortense told the story of her acquaintance with young Macie and the intimacy which had resulted in her going to live at Burnt Quarter.

Yes, the witness knew that she had been the occasion of her brother's quarrel with Joe Macie, and that it was ungovernable rage occasioned by Macie's treatment of herself which had caused the prisoner to fire the fatal shot.

A servant had always been employed at Burnt Quarter during the time she resided there?

Always, Hortense answered.

She herself had never done any menial work during her residence at Burnt Quarter?

Never.

And then in answer to John's questions Hortense told the story of Joe Macie's last visit to Comorn Hall. How he had spoken to her father for a moment at the door, and had then come at once to the room where she was sitting with her

child. She repeated his words, reproaching her for having left Burnt Quarter, as nearly as she could recall them, and then his question—"Do you know what they want me to do?"

"And you answered?"

"That I did not know. That I did not know father had gone to Brentwood. I said I was sorry that he had gone. That there was nothing I wanted him to do."

"Will you please recall his answer as exactly as you can?"

"I can't remember his exact words, but he seemed suspicious, and intimated that I had instigated the course my father had taken. He said that my father had threatened, if he did not marry me, that he would turn Colonel Macie out of Brentwood by proving that you were the real owner. I remember Joe said that, and asked me what I knew about it."

"Can you recall your answer?"

"I said I knew nothing about it, that I always thought my father knew, but that he had never told me. Then Joe said he didn't believe there was any truth in what my father had told Colonel Macie. That he was only trying to frighten him so that he would insist on Joe's taking me north and marrying me. But Joe said that wouldn't work. That they couldn't bluff him. Then he wanted to see the baby."

"And then?" John prompted gently as Hortense hesitated, "and then?"

"Then I drew a corner of the shawl I had on my shoulders over the baby's face. I didn't want him to see it. I told him I didn't think it would live."

"Can you recall the answer he made?" John asked in a low voice.

The reply came almost in a whisper.

"He said that would not matter. That it would be just one nigger less, that was all. Then he said I could come back to Burnt Quarter whenever I liked, but he didn't want any little niggers around calling him papa. He said it looked badly. He said if it did live I could get grandmother to take care of it for me."

"And then?"

"Then—I—I couldn't endure it. I called to Eugene and my father to come and take him away, and never to let him come back again. Then father and Eugene came, and Joe said something about my having set a trap for him. Then grandmother came to the door and told father there were some gentlemen waiting outside on the lawn who wanted to see him at once. I only remember that my father asked Joe to wait. And I remember Joe said he would, but that he wanted my father to understand that while he was willing to take me back he would never marry me. Then Gene and Joe followed father out of the room. I was just going down to warn father not to leave them alone together when I heard shots—and I ran down the stairs—and saw Joe—at the foot of the tree—I had the baby in my arms—I ran to Joe—but he cursed me and pushed me away as he died."

"That is all," John Brent said.

Hortense rose and left the witness-stand.

There was a lull in the court room as Hortense resumed her place at her brother's side. Then the defense called Doctor J. C. Brent.

CHAPTER LIV

BRENT'S TESTIMONY

The commonwealth's attorney moved uneasily in his seat as Brent took his place on the witness-stand. The look of anxiety deepened in Colonel Macie's eyes, and even Miss Bessie's lips compressed themselves into a narrower and harder line. There were few in the court room who did not lean forward in their eagerness to catch the words the witness was about to speak.

"Doctor Brent," John asked, "have you any reason to believe that your son was actuated by fear of Colonel Macie's foreclosing the mortgage on Comorn Hall when he quarreled with young Mr. Macie?"

Slowly Brent raised his head from his breast, then lifting his hand he pushed back the thick grizzled hair from his forehead. For a moment his somber glance wandered over the court room; he was facing his last though not least interested audience.

Obviously he had aged and broken, even so he was still leonine and splendid of aspect, still resolute and masterful; a massive head cast in bronze and crowned with silver. Presently his eyes returned to his son and rested upon him reassuringly. Then, bending his undivided attention upon John Brent, he answered:

"No. No such motive actuated, or could actuate, my son. The only cause of serious quarrel which existed between them was young Mr. Macie's treatment of my daughter. There was no fear whatever in my mind, nor in my son's, that Colonel Macie would ever foreclose the mortgage which he held on Comorn Hall." Doctor Carniel laid his hand upon Mrs. Carniel's arm.

"Something's going to happen," he whispered. "Just look at Bessie Blackburn's face."

"Will you explain to the gentlemen of the jury in your own way why you believed that Colonel Macie had no such purpose?" John asked while intense silence reigned throughout the court room.

"I will do so," Brent answered. "But to make the matter quite clear I must go back a little, to the beginning of my business relations with Colonel Macie."

And before Gus Wyatt could protest Brent was in the midst of the story of the purchase of Comorn Hall, and of his acquisition, through Colonel Macie, of a one-third interest in the *Rappahannock Oyster Shell*, and of the carpetbagger's control of the policy of the paper because of his ability to secure financial backing for it.

"Almost the first direct use which Colonel Macie made of this power was, I understand, to procure the printing of a scurrilous article insinuating that you were not your mother's legal heir."

"That is a lie!" the commonwealth's attorney shouted, springing to his feet. "Your Honor, I protest against such evidence being introduced in this trial!"

"I will ask the witness one other question only along this line, Your Honor," John interposed. Then addressing the witness, he continued: "Did not Colonel Macie act for you not only when you acquired your interest in the newspaper in question but also when that interest was terminated?"

Doctor Brent bowed his head in assent.

"Colonel Macie bought out my interest at the time Mr. Wyatt first sought the office he now holds, the office of commonwealth's attorney. At that time I had made up my mind to dispose of my interest in the paper even at public sale if necessary. For all I know, Colonel Macie holds that interest still."

"I protest!" cried the Honorable Gus, his face purple with rage. "The evidence is immaterial and is introduced for the sole purpose of defaming me. I was as ignorant of the race

and the disreputable antecedents of this man at the time of the transaction to which he alludes as the vestry of Weyanoke was when it elected him to membership in that body. As for the base and contemptible insinuation that I acted as a tool for Colonel Macie, I am prepared to give the lie to any man who utters it! I might be more surprised at the course the eminent and learned young counsel has seen fit to pursue in seeking, not to try the case before the court, but to air his own private grievances and to discredit and drag down honorable men, if it were not so plain upon which side of the color line he stands!"

Judge Fairfield rapped for order.

John Brent, who had stood unmoved through the attack of the commonwealth's attorney, now spoke again.

"I claim, Your Honor, and I will show, that the evidence of this witness is directly relevant. I shall lay bare a conspiracy before this court which has a direct, clear and immediate bearing on the guilt or innocence of the prisoner, as it will enable us to establish the sole motive for his deed."

He paused for a moment and then spoke again.

"Your Honor, in consenting to appear in behalf of the accused, I had no thought that the revelations to be made might touch upon my own vital interests so closely. I did not undertake this case with any thought of what it might mean to me. Nor do I wish to trap the witness into any admissions which may prove valuable to me. I see, as all here must see, that a veil is about to be lifted, and a mystery cleared; but I assure Your Honor I am as ignorant of what is to be revealed as any one within these walls." Pausing again, his noble head held high, he swept the whole court room with his fearless eyes. "Let the evidence strike where it will, let it destroy my hope, let it blast my name forever, I ask in justice to the prisoner whose life is staked on the issue of this trial that the whole truth be told!"

"Go on! Go on!" came from a hundred voices in the court room.

Judge Fairfield rapped for order.

"With Your Honor's permission I will continue to question the witness."

As he spoke John turned again and faced Doctor Brent.

"You then had knowledge of certain matters which gave you a power over Colonel Macie, sufficient, in your opinion, and in the opinion of your son, to prevent him from foreclosing the mortgage which he holds on Comorn Hall?"

"I had, and have, such knowledge."

"Your son shared your confidence?"

"Latterly he did."

"By latterly do you mean since the subject of the foreclosure came up?"

"Yes."

"Fully?"

"Fully."

"So that your opinion and belief were also his opinion and belief?"

"Yes."

"Will you explain, freely and in your own way, to the gentlemen of the jury of what this knowledge consisted? And of how it might have been used to deter Colonel Macie from exercising his legal right to take possession of Comorn Hall when his mortgage falls due?"

"He knew that the day he took Comorn Hall from me I could turn him out of Brentwood neck and crop."

"How could you do this?"

"By producing the evidence I have in my possession of your mother's marriage, and so establishing your claim to Brentwood as her lawful heir."

"You mean that you have absolute proof of my mother's marriage and that you know my father's name?"

"I have such proof. I know your father's name."

A hush fell upon the assembly. Even the commonwealth's attorney dared not interpose an objection. Colonel Macie shrank back in his seat, his eyes never leaving the face of the witness. Miss Bessie drew a short sharp breath audible in the stillness to those about her. On Doctor Carniel's fine face the

look of poignant anxiety was merging into a great radiance. Extending his hand he placed it upon his wife's, their fingers knit together, but the eyes of neither were for a moment's space removed from the dark face of the witness for the defense.

John Brent stood, leaning slightly forward, resting his clenched hands upon the table before him, his face as pale as death, his eyes dilated and fixed upon the lips which were to speak his father's name at last.

Brent spoke deliberately:

"John Page Hamilton, your father, was the eldest of the two sons of General Stuart Hamilton of New York."

At the words Douglas Hamilton, who was seated behind Colonel Washington, half started up. Bushrod, who sat beside him, laid his hand upon his shoulder and drew him down again.

"That was my uncle," whispered the young New Yorker, and stared at the attorney for the defense with a new interest.

Disregarding the momentary interruption, Doctor Brent continued:

"General Hamilton was a graduate of West Point. He had served in the Mexican War with distinction, and had then retired from the army to devote his attention to the management of his property, which was very extensive. The general was a strong Union man. His wife, however, was a native of this state. Their eldest son, Mr. John, had been educated at the University of Virginia in deference to his mother's wishes. While in Virginia he became intimate with his mother's people, and so became an ardent southern sympathizer. At the outbreak of the Civil War General Hamilton volunteered, and called Mr. John home, fully expecting that he would enter the northern army. A bitter disagreement followed. Mr. John refused to obey his father's wishes. The mother interposed, but in the end the general, calling his son a traitor, disinherited and disowned him, forbidding him ever to use the name which, to his mind, he had disgraced. Mr. John returned to Virginia and taking the name of Page, his

mother's name, enlisted in the southern army. Soon after this estrangement occurred Mr. John's mother died, and all intercourse ceased between the young man and his father's family. His only brother was, like the general, fighting in the northern ranks and shared the general's feeling of bitterness.

"When the war ended Mr. John remained in the South. During the last months of the war, and subsequently, he was often at Brentwood. The second Mrs. Brent was, in fact, a cousin of his mother's. No doubt there are some here who will remember the visits of Captain Page to Brentwood."

As though he had been addressed by name Colonel Washington solemnly nodded his head in assent.

"At the time of Mr. John's last visit to Brentwood there was dissension between Mrs. Brent and her stepdaughter, Miss Constance Brent. The trouble had its origin in the bitter animosity which Mrs. Brent entertained for my mother and for me. Miss Constance had always striven to befriend us. Mr. John sided with Miss Constance, and Mrs. Brent, in a fit of temper, forbade him ever to return to Brentwood. She was an imperious, embittered and disappointed woman, who tortured herself and those about her, but I do not think, as I now look back, that she meant to cause the harm she did. However that may be, she made Miss Constance's life so intolerable that in the end she fled from Brentwood and joined Mr. John in Washington. I accompanied her. From Washington Mr. John and Miss Constance went to Hagerstown, in Maryland, where they were married. I was present at that marriage.

"Having a promise of employment as a civil engineer in Canada, Mr. John, or Captain John, as I always called him after the war, took his wife north. I went with them as their servant. For a time we were in Ottawa. Later we went to Montreal. Not long after settling in Montreal Captain John contracted an illness, brought on by exposure during the severe winter weather.

"He was taken to the home of Doctor Moreau, an old

French physician, who sometimes received patients in his house. Miss Constance went with her husband as his nurse, while I found a place in the household assisting with anything that came to hand when I was not engaged in helping Miss Constance in the captain's room.

"It was in Doctor Moreau's house that Captain John died. At this time Miss Constance must have written to her step-mother, for not long after her husband's death she received a letter from Mrs. Brent full of sympathy and remorse for her harsh conduct. In the letter of which I speak Mrs. Brent urged Miss Constance to meet her in Philadelphia, where she was called on some business. She spoke of her hope that Miss Constance would return with her to Brentwood.

"A copy of this letter is now in Colonel Macie's possession. The original I have."

At this direct allusion many looked toward Colonel Macie, who appeared to shrink still farther back in his seat. Miss Bessie's eyes were now fixed upon her hands, which were tightly folded in her lap.

"When Miss Constance made her hurried journey south she took with her only a small hand-bag; her trunk was left in Doctor Moreau's care. No doubt she thought she might return if her meeting with Mrs. Brent should not prove satisfactory. As her means were slender, and as Mrs. Brent had always entertained a strong aversion for me, I remained behind at Doctor Moreau's. I was to follow if Miss Constance decided to return to Brentwood, and Mrs. Brent consented to my presence.

"Some business connected with an inheritance took Doctor Moreau to France. Miss Constance sent no message back. Only a long silence followed her journey south. I believed she had returned to Brentwood and that Mrs. Brent had been unwilling that I should follow. Doctor Moreau shared this theory. It was years before I learned the truth.

"In time I became Doctor Moreau's pupil. His daughter became my wife. On the old doctor's death I not only succeeded to his practise, but his house became my house, and

Miss Constance's old trunk, along with others in the attic, came into my possession. I had completely forgotten its existence until I came to pack my household effects preparatory to moving to Virginia. Then I saw and remembered it. But I never undid the fastenings nor opened it until I did so at Comorn Hall. Among Miss Constance's letters I found one which I have here," touching his breast, "showing that she had long been aware that I was her father's son. And that it was owing to this knowledge that she had constituted herself my protectress even as a child.

"Besides many letters from her husband, and old photographs, the trunk contained the certificate of her marriage, signed by the clergyman who had officiated, and by those who witnessed the ceremony, with a great quantity of other evidence of such a nature as to be beyond all dispute." He paused. Then by an effort of the will he seemed to put away the past, save as it bore upon the present.

"Knowing all this, having all these papers in my possession, it must be evident that I could at any moment have established the legality of your birth and so forced Colonel Macie to surrender Brentwood to you. By withholding this information I have made myself a party to a criminal conspiracy to defraud you. For the course I took I make no apology. I had great personal provocation. But there can be no doubt that so long as Colonel Macie could secure my silence by leaving me unmolested at Comorn Hall he had no desire to make me an open enemy. It is my belief that had he been able to compel his son to comply with my demands and marry my daughter, he would have done so rather than be forced to admit that he and his wife had deliberately defrauded you, and had driven your mother to her death an exile from her father's house."

It was late in the afternoon when Doctor Brent concluded, and Judge Fairfield adjourned the court until the following morning.

As Doctor Brent left the witness-stand he drew a thick

well-filled envelope from an inner pocket and handed it to John.

"All the essential evidence is here," he said. "These are the most important papers. Everything else which I have that belonged to your mother shall be sent you to-morrow. Whatever happens I thank God I have this load off my conscience at last." Then he added: "Their motive for the shooting is knocked into a cocked hat or I'm very much mistaken. It's a plain case of my son resenting a wrong to his sister. They've tried to dodge the real issue, but they can't evade it now. If there is fair play for a man who has a drop of black blood in his veins the jury's got to free my son."

Before John could reply Brent had turned and left the court room.

Immediately a little circle formed about John. Mrs. Carniel was the first to reach him.

"I don't care what they call him, he'll always be John Brent to me," she sobbed as she embraced him fondly. "John Hamilton's a good enough name, I reckon, but he'll always be John Brent to me."

After Mrs. Carniel came the doctor.

"And I was the one who didn't want you to go into this trial," he said. "You've had to wait a long while, boy, but it's all come right at last, thank God for that."

"If only my mother knew," John said.

"I've faith enough to think she does know," the doctor answered as he wrung John's hand.

Next came Colonel Washington, beaming and voluble.

"Well, well, old Julius Cæsar's done one good day's work at last; we've all got to allow that, gentlemen. Pity he hadn't done it the first day he came. It might have saved a heap of misery, a heap of misery. He's pulled Gus Wyatt off his high horse, and he's kicked that rascal Yankee out of Brentwood, and he's given Bessie Blackburn the bitterest pill she ever had to swallow. Old vitriol and vinegar got more than they bargained for, I reckon. Either one would sell the other

cheap to-day. Well, well, it's better late than never, better late than never. Come on, gentlemen, come on," he called to Grandpa Bird and those who stood near the patriarch, uncertain whether to approach or to withdraw, "court's adjourned, and you've all got as good a right here as Judge Fairfield himself."

"There was foreordination into hit," said the patriarch as he permitted himself to be thrust forward by those who looked to him confidently to sustain the high character he bore as one who suited the word to the occasion. "Yes, sir, there certainly was foreordination into hit. It was fixed up for to happen as you might say. I declare it was. The ways of Providence is all they ought to be, they ain't none too highly spoken of; but they're slow a-coming! Yes, sir, they're as certain as a setting hen, but they're most as slow as if she was a setting onto china eggs."

Among the first to offer their congratulations had been Douglas Hamilton. From him John learned that while General Hamilton had disinherited his son, all his wife's independent means had been bequeathed him, or his heirs. This property having long lain in trust, was now a considerable fortune which would belong to John.

"There's a client waiting to see you in your office," Colonel Washington whispered in John's ear at the first opportunity. "Her mother's with her, and I reckon her business is very important."

"Ada?" John questioned. "I didn't know that she was here."

"She and her mother have been at the court-house all day. Ada didn't know how things were coming out and she wanted to be on hand if there was any trouble. I've sent Bush to tell her. But I don't reckon she'll believe a word of it till she sees you."

Then when John was gone the colonel turned to the others to consider the great news.

"John!" Ada cried as he crossed the threshold of his little office. "Oh, John, it's wonderful. John Hamilton! But,

oh, I want my John Brent back, just my own John Brent. It takes you away from me—I don't know—oh, no, no, John. I'm glad, so glad for you, so glad for myself, so glad. Mother knows—"

But Mrs. Beverley had gone. So Ada pressed her cheek against his breast and quite broke down.

"I'm white at last!" John said as he held her in his arms. "I'm white at last! Kiss me, Ada, and tell me I'm going to be happy after all. I've got my name cleared. I've got Brentwood back, and I've got you—kiss me—and tell me it's all true. Ada! Ada! can you realize it! I'm white! I'm proved white—my father was a southern soldier, one of our own people. No one can ever cast a slur on me again, nor on my mother's name. Oh, Ada, Ada! Only your faith and courage kept my hope alive. Just your hand, just this little hand, kept me from sinking long ago."

"Oh, never that, John, your own strength, your own faith, not any strength of mine, your own courage, not my courage, made you steadfast. There never was a doubt this day would come, but I'm so glad that it has come at last. So glad, oh, John, so glad! so glad!"

"If mother had only lived," John said. "All the time he was telling the story I kept saying over and over to myself: 'It's too late now. Why didn't you tell it then? Why didn't you tell it then?'"

"I know," Ada answered. "Yes, I know, but try to remember that this good comes to you from her after all." Presently she added: "Tell me, John, is there any hope that you can save his son?"

"I don't know," he answered somberly. "It's hard to tell. Joe Macie only got what he deserved. But those men on the jury aren't thinking of what happened at Comorn. They're thinking of what happened at Avalon."

"But Polly wouldn't want them to remember that. She paid. She wouldn't want him to pay too. I never liked him when he lived with Watt and Douglas in the club house, at least I never trusted him. But he was very young, and

thoughtless; I don't believe he ever understood how base and treacherous his action really was."

"He doesn't understand it even now," John said.

For a time they spoke of the aspects of the trial. Then a realization of the great change which had come to John's fortunes swept away all other considerations. Joy came back to them and with it the thought of their own happiness.

"Ada, when are you going to be married?" he asked her like a happy boy.

"When are you?" she laughed. "You know I'm not even engaged to anybody yet, are you?"

"Yes, I am now, to you," he cried, drawing her to him. Then he added seriously: "Say we'll be married as soon as this trouble is over. Promise it, Ada."

"Agnes and Douglas are to be married in October."

"We'll be married then," John said decisively.

The news that the mystery of John Brent's birth had been swept away by the testimony of Doctor Brent was telephoned from point to point throughout the Northern Neck. Then the telegraph wires took up the story and spread it over the whole land. Mrs. Delafield read it in her morning paper, and sat stunned and bewildered, her coffee untasted in its Sèvres cup. John Brent was John Hamilton, her brother's son, her nephew. The circle in its widening had touched even her life. As she thought, the tragic figure of the deposed negro leader as she had last seen him in her drawing-room rose before her vision.

"At least he was cast in a heroic mold," she sighed.

Public relief and joy ran high, and for a moment the greater issue of the trial, the life or death of Eugene Brent, was almost forgotten.

It was immediately stated on behalf of Colonel Macie and Miss Bessie that they had been as completely taken by surprise as John himself, and that Doctor Brent had never given them the slightest intimation of the truth.

But Brent scouted their statement, saying that since the day before the shooting Colonel Macie had been in possession

of copies of all the most important papers and letters bearing on Miss Constance's marriage to Captain Hamilton.

When court convened on the following morning, while the prosecution was still staggered by Brent's revelations, John summed up for the defense. After recapitulating the evidence he continued:

"Under these circumstances, a white man in the South would be practically certain of acquittal, or would, at most, receive the lightest sentence. Is it not the whole spirit of the South, its higher and unwritten law, that the first duty of its men is to shelter and protect its women?"

He cited precedent after precedent for the enlightenment of the jury. He showed how rarely a white man who had sought to protect, or to avenge, the honor of wife, or sister, or daughter, had ever been convicted of murder in the first degree, and at last he asked the jurors if they intended to condemn the prisoner because of a few drops of negro blood.

"Gentlemen, you can not repudiate the white blood in his veins. He may repudiate it, but you can not. I admit that the act of the prisoner was a lawless act, but I say it was the act of a white man, that it sprang from the same motives which would prompt a white man, and that it should be judged as the act of a white man. And it is my most solemn conviction and belief that if Eugene Brent were known to be a white man, and his sister a white woman, he would leave this court room a free man!

"By your own standards, by that higher law, the conscience of all right-thinking, honor-loving people, you must acquit him, or you must say to the world in effect that there is one justice for the white man and another justice for the negro."

He paused, and then continued earnestly.

"You have seen that these two young men had no motive for their quarrel save the relations which one bore to the sister of the other. The story which you heard yesterday from the lips of the father of the prisoner leaves no room for you to doubt. I appeal to you to remember this; to fix your minds on the one simple and single duty before you, to forget the prisoner's

birth, to forget his relationship, to banish all thought of his past, and of that deep shadow to which I may not here allude, and to free him for the love of impartial justice, for the honor of your state, and the credit and safety of the whole South, in a word, to deal with him as you would deal with a white man, to free him as you would free a white man if a white man stood in his place to-day."

When John had resumed his seat beside the prisoner Gus Wyatt rose and addressed the jury.

The learned though youthful counsel for the defense was right, he said. The prisoner at the bar was not then on trial for any happening of the past, however tragic. For that he might well thank his God. For the sins of the past he would in due time have to answer to a higher court. To-day he was on trial for the assassination of a white man who had voluntarily and unsuspectingly placed himself in the power, and at the mercy, of the prisoner at the bar, and of his father, by visiting their home. This confidence had been most grossly betrayed. Young Macie had been fired upon without warning. It was true that he had then attempted to defend himself, and that the assassin had received a slight wound in the shoulder; but the dead man had, according to the testimony to which they had listened, fired solely in self-defense. If white men in the South were to be shot down after this fashion, who would be safe?

He reviewed the evidence carefully and presented the case to the jury as an atrocious and unjustifiable murder of a white man by a negro. They must not, he warned the gentlemen of the jury, permit themselves to be diverted from their plain duty by the dramatic announcement concerning his young friend John Brent, he begged his pardon, John Hamilton he must call him now.

Rather he would ask them to remember the years of hardship and suffering which the late Mrs. Hamilton had endured, wholly because of the criminal silence of Julius Cæsar Brent. He did not put much faith in Doctor Brent's belated assertion that Colonel Macie had been placed in possession of the

interesting facts divulged in his evidence prior to the shooting. But even if Doctor Brent's statement was in the main correct, it was not unnatural that Colonel Macie should have regarded the information, emanating from such a doubtful source, at such an opportune moment, as probably false, a mere form of blackmail, and he had not unnaturally waited for further proof before he reopened an old wound.

It was still his opinion that the young men had quarreled over the business relations of their fathers, and not over the very doubtful honor of the prisoner's sister.

He asked for a verdict of murder in the first degree.

Judge Fairfield instructed the jury and the jury retired.

John leaned nearer the prisoner to whisper some words of hope. Brent smiled encouragingly upon his son, but dared not trust himself to speak, while Hortense clung trembling to her brother's arm.

Eugene alone was perfectly composed and master of himself, listening appreciatively to John's words, meeting his father's wan smile with a glance of deep affection, tender and reassuring to Hortense.

Many moved restlessly, but no one spoke in the court room. Outside the crowds of negroes stood in scattered groups about the open space before the court-house, waiting, in graphic silence, for the verdict. All talk had ceased among them.

The sunlight of the warm September afternoon had deepened to amber, there was a glow of russet dusk along the edges of the woods; only the distant cawing of the crows disturbed the awful stillness which suddenly imposed itself on those who waited to know whether Eugene Brent should live or die.

In less than twenty minutes the jury filed into the court room and resumed their places in the jury box.

Doctor Bibby stood up and delivered the verdict to the judge. The verdict was guilty of murder in the first degree.

Judge Fairfield then bade the prisoner rise, and pronounced the sentence of death, and the trial of Eugene Brent for the killing of Joe Macie was at an end.

CHAPTER LV

AFTER THE SENTENCE

At the conclusion of the trial Hortense and her father were permitted a brief interview with Eugene in the sheriff's parlor.

Before they entered, John, who had accompanied Eugene from the court room, said earnestly: "I'm sorrier than I can tell you to have things end in this way. I did my best, but I can't help blaming myself for the result. My feeling and my judgment are both against the verdict. I'm going to try for an appeal."

"No use," Eugene answered. "I knew what the verdict would be. You did everything that any man could do down here." He hesitated for a moment and then added: "I used to hold what happened at Avalon that night against you. I thought if you hadn't brought that story down from Montreal I might have bluffed it through. I used to think I could have made Polly happy even if she learned who I was afterward. I want to tell you that I've changed my mind. You did the right thing. The thing you had to do. I see that now. Get my father to go back to Canada if you can. Get him to take my sister away from here before things are any worse for them. Poor old governor, there's something to his side of all this question, something to be said even for the wrong things he's done." He paused again while a cold smile hovered on his handsome lips. "If we're just niggers, as they say, and niggers are like children as I've heard so often since I came down here, I think they make us pay a pretty heavy price for our mistakes."

As he spoke Doctor Brent and Hortense entered the room. John turned to go.

"I'll be waiting for you in my office, Doctor Brent," he said

as Brent advanced. "We'd better talk over what we're going to do about an appeal before you leave the court-house."

If Brent heard him he made no reply. A strange, eager, poignant smile was on his lips, a measureless abyss of terror in his stricken eyes; his groping hands were palsied as they sought Eugene's.

"Gene, Gene," he whispered hoarsely. "Gene, we're not beaten; no, no, we're not beaten yet."

"Good old governor," the young man said, putting his arms affectionately about his father who tottered as he spoke. "Sit down, and let's talk it over. Of course, we're not beaten yet."

"No, no, not beaten yet," Brent repeated, sinking upon the chair John placed for him. "Good boy, Gene. No, no, not beaten yet."

Hortense, her face drawn and ashen, her eyes terrible in their knowledge and their fear, stole mutely to her brother's side as John hurried from the room.

Doctor Brent, with John's assistance, at once attempted to appeal the case. But his effort was without success. Such delays of justice were frowned upon as being conducive to mob violence. It was felt by all the substantial men of the community that it was imperatively necessary to vindicate the law and to have an end to the dangerous agitation which would not subside while Eugene Brent lived.

Once grim justice had asserted itself the restlessness among the negroes would abate and gradually die out. Therefore but little time was permitted to elapse between the hour the jury delivered its verdict and the day set for the execution. Two weeks from the day on which he was convicted Eugene Brent was to die.

The verdict and the sentence were satisfactory to the community. The South applauded the action of the court, while opinion at the North held that justice might well have been tempered with mercy. Bitter editorials were written, sides were taken, and once more Brent's well-known name was heard throughout the land, reviving the old contentions.

Most significant of all, the negroes began to turn to him

again. Among the more radical and daring spirits there was a strong and growing impulse to go to his support. "Where," they asked one another, "if he really robbed us, is his wealth?" Manifestly there was no evidence of it, while the Adrians, and many like them, who claimed to have been ruined by his defalcation, retained every evidence of their former prosperity.

The trial wrought many changes.

Although Commonwealth's Attorney Wyatt had secured the verdict he demanded the end of the trial left him discredited. His subterranean connection with Colonel Macie, now easily traced and obvious to all, and his part in the persecution of John Hamilton were neither forgotten nor forgiven.

The Macies, to every one's surprise, made the best of a bad business, and, surrendering Brentwood with what grace they could, returned to Burnt Quarter to await the day when the law would give them possession of Comorn Hall.

Once more at Brentwood, John's first act was to reinstate Aunt Jane and Uncle Isaac. Doctor Carniel and his Matilda came down from the Cross Roads, and while John and the doctor inspected the fields with Uncle Isaac, Mrs. Carniel and Aunt Jane aired out the house, as Aunt Jane said, to rid it of every vestige of the hated Macies. Each piece of furniture and every ornament and painting was carefully restored to the exact place it had occupied in Miss Constance's time, till not a trace of the long residence of the usurpers remained.

"Home's got to look like it was home," the old negress said as she bustled about the house. "I'se gwine burn a pan of sulphur in the room that Yankee slep' in the fustus chance I gits. 'Deed I can smell that Yankee yet."

A deep contentment filled John's heart. He was a white man again, his position acknowledged and assured, master of his mother's lands, and of her home, and free at last to make his happiness complete.

The public, while thoroughly approving the sentence of the court, bore John no ill will for the part he had taken in the trial. Indeed the community was as proud of the course John had pursued as it was well satisfied with the result.

Eugene Brent had been defended earnestly by the hero of the hour; that he had lost under such circumstances was evidence to all the world of the fairness of the trial. Even John's persistent efforts to secure a new trial, a stay of execution, or a pardon, caused no irritation. The community approved his course, applauded him for it, but steadily pursued its own.

Even at Avalon no resentment was felt against John Brent, as Judge Beckford still called him. The boy had simply done his duty, that was all. And so Judge and Mrs. Beckford joined their congratulations to the others.

Mrs. Delafield, much impressed by the romantic circumstances of her nephew's story, gave vent to her feelings at her writing table.

"How you will like your father's people now that you have found them, I do not know," she wrote to John. "For my part I live on indifferent terms with most of them. However, you must endeavor to like me. My friends are disagreeable enough to say that I am old. I am rich, and a childless widow. Therefore it will be wise for you to pay court to me. I detest your cousin Douglas. Your father was my favorite brother. If you resemble him you may hope for much from me. My father was cruelly unjust to him. Under other circumstances how different your poor mother's life might have been. It is strange that I should have known Doctor Brent, and that he once mentioned your father's name to me. Strange that I should have held this clue in my hands, and yet been unaware of its value. The papers speak of your engagement to a Miss Beverley. I hope she is all that you deserve and that I can approve. Am I right in supposing her a member of the distinguished family which once owned Comorn Hall?"

In replying John told his aunt of his marriage which was to take place in the autumn, and Mrs. Delafield, who had put her yacht in commission for a cruise in the West Indies, followed an impulse and steamed down the Potomac and dropped

anchor in the cove which separated Brentwood from Comorn and Piccadilly.

The morning being propitious Mrs. Delafield ordered her launch. But by some misunderstanding or caprice landed not at Brentwood but on the classic shore of Piccadilly.

"I ain't what you might call high strung up nor proud," said Mr. Bird with a simple dignity, in which a touch of melancholy mingled, when at a later hour he referred to the incident in conversation with Colonel Washington. "No, sir, I ain't high strung up nor proud, I don't reckon I got no cause to be, but when the seat of a man's pants is wore right through to the bone, as you might say, an' your wife's took an' put in a splice of calico quilt, an' you're a leaning over for to bug the late potato vines like what I was this forenoon, it ain't no time for to meet up with lady strangers. A gentleman feels took at an advantage of, as you might say, an' it ain't no comfort to him for to recollect that he's a-going to buy a new pair of overalls when he can get his credit back to what it used to be. I ain't above bugging a patch of potatoes, but I wisht like hell I'd had my Sunday pants on when that lady come ashore to ask the way to Brentwood House. Yes, sir, I had a hand-to-hand conversation with her, as you might say. Grandest lady ever I see, an' she let you know she knowed it too. Well, sir, when she took an' named it to me that she was own aunt to Mr. John you could of keeled me over with a broom straw. An' then she asked me to step into her launch that pretty, an' I had to pilot her across the cove an' right up to the door of Brentwood House, an' if Mr. John hadn't of sent Uncle Isaac after me to call me in to have a swig of corn whisky I ain't no manner of doubt but what the spine of my back would of broke right down an' quit."

"I declare it would," said Grandpa Bird with deep conviction.

"The world's full of trouble," Mr. Bird continued. "Yes, sir, she's full of toil an' trouble, an' a pore man don't stand no show nohow. Appearances is always against him, an' opin-

ion goes a heap more by appearances than by blood in these days."

"Blamed if it doesn't," Colonel Washington agreed. "I'll be dogged if that isn't about so, Murphy," he added, remembering his own Joseph's coat and certain inopportune visits of his neighbors.

The age and dignity of Brentwood, its mossy setting, and its priceless treasures, made an altogether favorable impression on Mrs. Delafield. That her brother should have chosen his bride from such a home was worthy of his traditions. Her favorite brother's son became at once her favorite.

Douglas Hamilton was summoned from the club house at Piccadilly and both young men dined with their aunt aboard her yacht.

"My nephew is handsome, very," the lady confided to her journal that night before retiring. "And strikingly like his father. The same distinction, the same slight sternness; a sign of self-repression; he will be a disciplinarian of himself rather than of others. Fine in manner, but quite without superficial polish, slow perhaps, sure certainly; a simple nature of the nobler sort. To-morrow I am to meet the girl of his choice. He adores her. If she is worthy of him what happiness is in store for both. He speaks with deep concern of the unfortunate youth who is so soon to die. All his efforts to secure a new trial have thus far been unavailing. When I sail he accompanies me, to leave the yacht at Old Point Comfort, thence he proceeds to Richmond to make a personal appeal to the Governor of Virginia for a reprieve. On this last effort all his hopes, and those of Doctor Brent, are staked. The hem of my garment seems caught in the whirlpool."

Mrs. Delafield's pen hovered and poised itself above the page. Then she wrote:

"This is my mother's native land, a land of a strong essence, of a strange aroma. It is a land where, though death comes

and goes as in all other lands, yet time itself stands still. In all the sunshine there is mingled a shadow, the shadow of past sunshine. Here more than elsewhere to-day is the child of yesterday. The past has withdrawn a little, but, like a fond mother, it smiles upon the present. Here to live is to remember: elsewhere to live is to forget."

Closing her journal, and locking it away, Mrs. Delafield called to her maid, who brought a wrap. The moon was shining when she went on deck. For a time she stood by the rail alternately looking toward the low shores of Brentwood and the highland upon which Comorn stood. Perhaps her look lingered longest on Comorn.

"Oh, Liberty, how many crimes have been committed in thy name," she quoted. She sighed, shivered and went below.

On the next day Mrs. Delafield met Agnes and Ada and the ladies from Piccadilly, with Colonel Washington, who accompanied them to Brentwood. She was charmed with Ada, and at once developed a great intimacy with Colonel Washington.

"An absolute aristocrat," she murmured in John's ear. "Not a mere business man masquerading, in a well-tailored coat, as a gentleman out of office hours, nor a temporary statesman, but a real representative of an authentic aristocracy, as obsolete as a Spanish grandee, but as perfect."

"I wish we could keep the boy away from Northmoreland, ma'am. I wish we could prevent him from coming back from Richmond, until after they hang Eugene Brent," the colonel confided to Mrs. Delafield. "The thing is preying on his mind. He can't give up, and no one can tell what may happen before we're through with this business."

"You fear some serious trouble?" the lady asked.

"I don't know just exactly what I do fear," the colonel answered. "But, as the darkies say, I can't rest easy in my mind. Things haven't looked right to me since the trial ended. Something's on foot at Comorn or I'm much mistaken. Old Julius Cæsar isn't the man to let his boy swing without a last effort. Too many niggers have been coming and going

about there after dark. Boat loads of them have been crossing from Maryland; the boats lying in the cove for half the night. There's no doubt that the negroes are stirring. If John secures a stay of execution when he sees the governor we're sure to have trouble with the whites; but if he fails I'll look for trouble from the niggers. There's trouble coming one way or the other."

"But I understood that Doctor Brent had lost all hold upon the negroes since the failure of his great enterprise," said Mrs. Delafield.

The colonel shook his head.

"It seemed so, that's what we all thought, but there has been a marked change since the trial ended. We're on the lookout. All I hope is we won't be taken by surprise whichever way the cat jumps."

Late that afternoon Mrs. Delafield's yacht weighed anchor and passed down the river. John Hamilton accompanied his aunt.

"If we can only get by the hanging," Colonel Washington said the next morning when he had driven to the Cross Roads to make some purchases at Mr. Hesketh's grocery. "If we can only get by the hanging things will begin to quiet down, I reckon. The air doesn't seem to breathe right this morning. There's trouble afoot as sure as shooting."

"It looks to me as though matters were bound to be worse before they are better," Mr. Braxton said.

"They'll never be better," Doctor Carniel interposed. "Not while that man stays on at Comorn Hall. He's like a thorn in our flesh. We'll never have peace while he's there. I want to see him leave this region altogether."

"Did you know," Colonel Washington asked, "that his son is to hang on the very day that he must vacate Comorn? I asked Judge Fairfield if he knew about it when he sentenced the boy. But it was a pure accident. Sheriff's work for father and son both on the same day. I hear Julius Caesar hasn't made a sign of moving out or giving up possession. Things going on just as though he expected to stay there all his life."

Colonel Washington paused to collect his purchases. Over the barrier which he erected with them before his ample breast he spoke again:

"I've been half hoping he'd ask us to make good our offer to buy back the Hall in time to save it from Macie. Of the two I'd about as soon have old Julius Cæsar there, as have Macie for a neighbor. Take that nigger all in all, gentlemen, and he's more of a man than the Yankee. He's got to go down, and his boy's got to hang, but I can't help feeling sorry for them both, blessed if I can. But I wouldn't admit it to another living soul; no, sir, not to another living soul." The colonel heaved a heavy sigh. "What's got to be done's got to be done. But I like the way he's stood by his boy. And I ain't a thing against the boy for shooting Joe Macie. I'd have done it myself under the same circumstances, only quicker; but I can't forget Avalon; I can't forget Avalon. There wasn't a man on that jury that cared a straw for Joe Macie, but it gave them their chance."

At five o'clock that afternoon Doctor Brent received a telegram from John Hamilton. It read: "The governor absolutely refuses to grant a reprieve."

CHAPTER LVI

THE END

A little after ten o'clock that night Colonel Washington and the household at Piccadilly were aroused by a sharp knocking on the door and the familiar voice of Murphy Bird calling from the darkness.

"You're needed quick, Colonel. Word's come through from the court-house that Doctor Brent and more'n a hundred niggers are gathering in the woods by the big swamp to break the jail and rescue Mr. Eugene. The telephone wires are down. Jake Yutsy brought the word to me. They've sent to Avalon, and all down that-a-way, and for Major Blackburn and Captain Fauntleroy. We are all to meet at the Cross Roads as quick as we can get there. Grandpap come across the fields with me, and Sadie she's following with Salvadorie. Grandpap's gone down to the club house to pass word to Mr. Watt and Mr. Douglas."

Then as Colonel Washington opened the door he added :

"They say old Julius Cæsar's sworn they'll never hang his son in Northmoreland County, while God reigns!"

As he spoke Watt Beverley and Douglas Hamilton joined the group in the doorway with Grandpa Bird close at their heels.

"Come on, boys," the colonel cried as he saw them. "Watt, you take the bay horse, Douglas, you take the one in the next stall. Bush and I'll take the team between us. That leaves old Major for you, Murphy. You've got your guns, boys, and plenty of ammunition? All right then, saddle up. I'll be with you as soon as I get my suspenders buttoned. A man ought to be born with his pants on, that's my opinion! This is the end," he added, turning to the startled women

of his household. "Thank God, John Brent's in Richmond and safe out of this. It was the governor's refusal to grant a reprieve that set the spark to the tinder. I looked for trouble, but it seems I didn't look quick enough. No, no, not all of you!" he cried to the sons who swarmed about him. "Some of you boys have got to stay here to guard your mother and the house. Keep your guns by you and don't let any man come near who can't show a white skin. Once trouble starts no one knows where it will end. All right," he called to Watt and Douglas Hamilton who galloped to the door, while Bush followed with the colonel's horse. "All right, Watt, you and Douglas go first and rouse out every white man between this and Weyanoke. You've got the best horses. Send all the women and children right down the Neck to Piccadilly. Here! boys, give me a boost. I'm all right once I'm up, but I'm not so nimble as I used to be." Then from the saddle he called his last instructions. "Ada, you girls take your revolvers and keep them within reach every minute. I'm more afraid of stragglers than of any mob they can collect. Grandpa, you stay here with Sadie Bird and Salvadorie. Look out that no one sets fire to the barn. Come on, Murphy. Already, boys!" And the little cavalcade dashed off into the night.

White, but resolute, Ada and Agnes, Miss Page, Mrs. Beverley and Mrs. Washington went about making fast the house and drawing the shades and curtains, while Grandpa Bird, at least a major-general in spirit, and the younger Washington boys took up their stations outside the house to watch if any one approached.

Meanwhile Doctor Brent and his followers had emerged from their rendezvous in the dense woods a mile beyond the Cross Roads, and were proceeding toward Northmoreland Court-House.

The great man had lost no time after receiving John's telegram. For days he had been perfecting his plans to meet such an emergency. When the message came he had acted at once. Thanks to the changed front of many of his friends, who had rallied to him after the conviction of his son, the forces at his

command were well armed and formidable, far outnumbering the soldiers who still remained to guard the jail.

Brent's purpose was to free Eugene, and then hurry him to a point on the shore of the Potomac where a boat would be in waiting to take him to Maryland. Once in Maryland he was to be secretly conveyed to Baltimore. From Baltimore he was to sail, under an assumed name, on a tramp steamer for Liverpool. From Liverpool he was to take ship to some Portuguese or Spanish port where he could lose himself.

A little after dusk, his last order given, his last messenger despatched, Brent had left Comorn in his victoria. Ostensibly his errand was to visit his son to break the news of John Hamilton's failure to secure a reprieve in Richmond.

From time to time, as the victoria passed along the road, dark figures left the woods and the great man halted for a moment's parley. At points where long disused wood tracks crossed the highway mounted men accosted the figure in the victoria and then vanished in the shelter of the forest.

Arrived at the Cross Roads, Brent entered the post-office and, after asking for his letters, crossed the road to Mr. Hesketh's store, where he made some purchases. It was afterward remembered by those who saw him that his manner was unusually urbane and gracious. He spoke confidently of his hope that the governor would reconsider his decision. Mr. Hamilton was to see him again before he left Richmond. No, he had no thought of making a personal appeal.

Then he had bade Mr. Hesketh a civil good night, and, leaving the store, had driven on toward the court-house.

Those of his partizans who had met Brent between his own gate and Weyanoke Cross Roads, after making a wide detour to avoid the village, rejoined their chieftain at a rendezvous a mile beyond it. Here, emboldened by their increasing numbers, they marched openly behind their leader.

So threatening a demonstration could not go unmarked, and the news was telephoned from point to point that the negroes had risen, and, led by Brent, were marching upon Northmoreland Court-House more than two hundred strong.

A half-mile before the court-house was reached the party halted. It was now after ten o'clock. The waning moon was rising above the tree-tops. Here Brent left his victoria and mounted a horse; another horse, saddled and bridled, was held in reserve for Eugene.

When the little cavalcade from Piccadilly, which had been augmented all along its way up Beverley's Neck by those whom Watt and Douglas Hamilton had routed out, reached the Cross Roads, it was joined by Judge Beckford, Major Blackburn, Captain Fauntleroy, Doctor Carniel, Doctor Bibby, Mr. Braxton, Mr. Hesketh, Jake Yutay, with all his kith and kin, and by many others who had been warned and had responded to the summons. All were waiting in the shadow of the blacksmith's shop. When the little forces merged they numbered twenty horsemen and as many men on foot. Still others, they knew, were riding from more distant neighborhoods to their assistance.

Just as the two parties met a young officer, mounted on a powerful horse, rode up coming from the direction of the court-house.

"For God's sake, gentlemen, be quick!" he cried, "the niggers have broken the jail and got the prisoner away. They're coming down this road! Two of our men were killed in the first skirmish when they dynamited the jail door. The sheriff's been wounded. Some of our boys have rallied and cut them off toward the Rappahannock, but unless you stop them Brent and his son will get across to Maryland and that may be the last you'll see of them!"

"I reckon we can prevent that," said Colonel Washington.

There was a brief consultation. Mr. Braxton, it was decided, was to remain with Mr. Hesketh to collect the women and children in the rectory, and to arm all those who could be trusted with weapons.

Then Colonel Washington spoke briefly:

"Gentlemen," he said, "I reckon all here agree with me that law and order have got to be maintained at any cost. Brent and his men have broken the jail and released Eugene

Brent, who was awaiting his execution. There has been bloodshed; lives have been taken. Until to-night we have left this business entirely in the hands of the authorities, we wanted no mob violence in Northmoreland County, we want none now. But that doesn't mean, gentlemen, we're going to let these guilty men escape. We may be outnumbered, but in any case it is better that we act in unison. Gentlemen, you'll be good enough to take orders from Judge Beckford, Major Blackburn and from me. Captain Fauntleroy, Doctor Carniel and Murphy Bird will take our places if we fall. That's understood. Very well, gentlemen, every man of you look to your arms. I reckon our business is up the road toward the court-house. Let's be about it."

Without more ado the little company fell into line and moved off briskly. Suddenly, not far ahead, they heard the beat of hoofs approaching.

"They're coming, gentlemen!" cried Colonel Washington. "Don't let Eugene Brent get away!"

The road wound now between a strip of woodland on the left, and a corn-field on the right. Beyond the corn-field the woods closed in again.

"They've seen us!" Watt called in warning. "Come on, Bush!"

Instantly the horsemen dashed ahead, and a moment later the opposing forces met in the dim moonlight. Eugene Brent was riding beside his father, his left arm still supported by a sling.

"Surrender the prisoner, or take the consequences!" cried Colonel Washington.

"Never!" Brent answered, rising in his stirrups.

As he spoke there was a sharp exchange of shots. With a rush the white men were upon the negroes.

Without checking his horse Judge Beckford rode in among them and leveling his revolver at Eugene Brent fired point-blank. The young man tottered in his saddle but did not fall.

Rifles, revolvers and shotguns blazed on either side. Eugene spurred forward and breaking through the line of white

men fled toward Comorn; fled for his life, as he had once fled before.

A shout came from the distance, the militia had rallied and had followed from the court-house.

Hemmed in on either side panic seized the negroes. They threw down their arms and scattered into the corn-field and the woods.

Judge Beckford wheeled his horse to follow Eugene, but a report rang out, and he pitched forward from his saddle shot through the forehead by Brent, who, with a savage cry, turned his horse into the woods and disappeared.

In the confusion father and son had both escaped.

"Murphy Bird," the colonel called. "You and Jake Yutsy take a dozen men and follow Julius Cæsar! Watt, you and my boys take the others on to Comorn after Eugene Brent! Doctor Carniel and I've got to stop here with Judge Beckford. The soldiers from the court-house can sentinel the roads till dawn."

Quickly and almost silently the party divided, Watt and those with him spurring on toward Comorn Hall, the others striking into the woods to follow and overtake Brent if they could.

Once within the shelter of the woods Brent abandoned his horse, and, trusting to his memory of the region, sought to make a short cut through the woods and swamps to Comorn hoping to rejoin Eugene and escape with him to Maryland in the motor-boat which lay in waiting in the cove.

His own life, as well as Eugene's, was forfeited if they were taken. That he knew. He felt a terrible anxiety, but it was rather for Eugene than for himself. He had no regrets. His lawless course had been forced upon him, he told himself as he stumbled forward. And it was better to die fighting, if they must die, than to die ignominiously by the merciless law of the white man.

As a boy he had often traversed the region at night, 'possum hunting, but now, in his eagerness and haste, he lost his way in

the gloom and murk of the forest. At last he became entangled in a network of briers and bamboo vines, through which he forced his way with difficulty only to come to a halt at the edge of the great swamp.

That he had mistaken his course had perhaps saved him from his pursuers who had followed the paths toward Comorn certain of his purpose to rejoin his son.

Slowly the night passed. The gray dawn was breaking when he came out through the woods behind Hamp Sam's deserted cabin. Here he paused to listen, but no sound came to him.

Reassured by the silence he advanced cautiously into the road. But the gray light revealed neither friend nor foe. Still skirting the woods he again advanced.

As he reached his gate the increasing light fell on a gruesome object which dangled grotesquely from the branch of a great tree which grew beside the gate. With a low moan Brent staggered forward and stood beneath the body of his son. Evidently Eugene had been overtaken here by his pursuers. The body had been riddled with bullets. The blood from many wounds was still dripping to the ground.

"Gene," he moaned. "Gene, my boy, my boy. My son, my son. And I, your father, brought you here to this!"

He sought to reach the body that he might cut it down. But the rope had been made fast at some height above the ground, and his efforts were unavailing. The body, swaying in the wind, turned its distorted features upon him. With an inarticulate cry of anguish Brent covered his eyes with his hands, and half ran, half stumbled on toward Comorn Hall.

All hope of escape, all desire to escape, had left him now. He had but two purposes: to release his son's body from the strangling rope, and never to be taken alive. These, and that no white man should ever live at Comorn after him.

Disregarding all caution, he made his way along the open road toward the Hall. As he approached the building he called to those he had left to guard it, but no answer came. The defenders all had fled.

"Hortense!" he called as he entered the house. "Hortense!" but still no answer came.

He remembered now that some one, his old mother maybe, had told him just as he was setting out upon his desperate mission, that Hortense's child had died. He searched the house, going from room to room. It was empty and desolate, vacant and without continuance. The thread of its life seemed to have snapped, and it stood a thing derelict and dead. Doom was upon it as upon himself and upon all that was his. Then he remembered that this was the last day of his ownership.

At least one thing remained to do.

He descended the steps to the basement and drew together some packing boxes which he found, half filled with straw, and brought papers, and kindling, and old barrels, and heaped them all at the foot of the stairs which led to the hall above. Then with an ax he broke in the top of a half filled oil barrel, and throwing buckets of the contents over the inflammable material, upturned the barrel, and then threw a lighted match upon the oil-soaked straw. The flames leaped up. In a moment the fire had spread and was lapping and licking the staircase.

This done he left the basement by an outer door. No one would come after him at Comorn Hall. No white man would ever again be master there. He was the last king of Comorn. It had cost enough.

"Hortense!" he called. "Hortense!"

Something took him toward the old burying-ground. Perhaps he meant to reach the river by that way. At the wall he paused. Within the enclosure was Hortense; the dead child, wrapped in her shawl, was lying on a pillow which she had placed upon the great sarcophagus of the "Signer."

"Hortense! what are you doing here?" he asked. "When I couldn't find you in the house I thought you had gone with all the rest."

She shook her head, and tried to smile at him.

"I knew you'd come back," she answered. "I've waited for you. When the men you left here saw the white men coming

they ran away. Some of them took the boat and are out there on the river now. Poor Gene! I heard the shots. I know. And some of them told me. Some of the negroes. The white men have been here searching for you. They'll come again."

"I know," Brent answered. "But it doesn't matter now. Where's mother?"

"She's somewhere hiding in the woods."

He entered the enclosure and stood beside her.

"Poor Hortense," he said. "Poor, poor Eugene."

"Poor father," said the girl, and tears came to her dry eyes. "And poor baby. Nobody named it, but I called it after Gene. Gene was a good brother to me always. I'm digging its little grave," she added. "Do you think I've dug it deep enough?"

He took the spade and deepened the shallow grave.

"I'd like to have buried baby nearer to some of the other graves," she said with a wan smile. "If he'd been white I'd have put him close beside one of them. He's so little to be left alone. But I don't think the dead white people will care if I put him close by the wall, do you?"

"Why should they care?" he asked in bitterness. "Most of his blood was theirs."

They buried the child in silence. When the task was done Brent looked off toward the Hall; smoke was creeping out from the basement windows.

"Now," said Brent, "I am going back for Gene."

But as he spoke, from the distance came the rapid beat of hoofs, and a wild shout.

"They're coming, father!" Hortense cried in sudden terror for him. "I didn't think they'd come so soon. You'd better hide while you can."

Brent smiled an odd smile.

"I'm not going to hide," he said deliberately. "There's plenty of time now. All the time in the wide world now. I'm never going to run from a white man again. You'd better go down to the shore and try to signal one of the boats. Maybe they'll put in and take you aboard. Whatever happens, nobody'll harm you."

"And you, father?" she asked.

"I'm going back to the house, I reckon. Good-by, Hortense."

"If you go I'm going with you, father."

"No. No. Hortense, you mustn't come," he urged. "Maybe there's something yet that you can live for. It's better for me to go alone."

But she kept at his side unmoved.

"You've set fire to the house," she said.

"Yes," he answered. "It goes down with me."

They could now see the horsemen approaching. They had passed Comorn Old Gate. Brent hurried toward the house as rapidly as his lameness permitted, Hortense still following him. Twice he turned and urged her to go back, but she still followed him.

"Don't let them take you alive, father. Don't let them boast that they have killed you!" she begged.

When they reached the house she paused in the doorway and looked off toward the men on horseback.

"One of them has a rope," she whispered. "Don't let them take you alive, father."

She followed him swiftly into the smoke-filled house. He hesitated and groped for a moment, but she took his hand and led him quickly toward the foot of the great staircase. It was already on fire; she did not hesitate, but led the way above.

Here she ran to a window and opened it, for the smoke was thick and stifling. Then she closed the door of the room and locked it.

A low roar came from below. The steps leading from the basement to the main floor had fallen, a part of the floor had given way, and the draft increasing swept a sheet of flame up the great staircase. The wainscoting was burning on the walls. Hortense clung to her father's hand.

"We're safe now, father," she panted.

"Yes, we're safe," he answered her.

He looked from the window. His pursuers were already about the house. Already they had surrounded it. He heard

Watt Beverley calling out that the man they sought was somewhere within the burning building.

Men ran up the stone steps to the door, but the hall was blazing, the staircase, sheeted in flame, impassable.

And then he heard a quick sharp order to bring a ladder. They would have him out dead or alive.

"You hear, father? They've gone for a ladder."

"I hear," he said.

She caught the revolver from his hand and turning it upon herself fired.

"Hortense!" he cried, and gathered her in his arms and held her against his breast. "Hortense. No. No. Hortense, my girl, my brave, brave girl."

She tried to smile at him, then gasped:

"You too, with Gene. With me. Don't let them take you alive, father. Don't. Let's go together."

With his free hand he took the weapon from her, looked at it. Then laid it upon a table near the window.

"No," he said proudly. "I know a better way to die!"

As he spoke a shout came from behind the building. They were coming with the ladder now.

Brent stepped before the dormer window, opening it wide. Hortense, clinging to his hand, sank slowly at his feet.

Those without saw only the massive figure standing alone in the window fearlessly looking down upon his adversaries.

As they saw him a fierce cry went up.

"There he is! There's the fiend!" "Hold on, boys!" "Wait! don't shoot!" "Take him alive! Take him alive!"

But they should shoot. Brent meant they should. He raised his hand imperiously for silence.

"You white men!" he cried, and his strong voice rang out with all its old authority and resonance, "you have done for me what I could not do for myself! To-morrow my name will be to my people what the name of John Brown has become to the nation!"

They lifted their guns.

"Don't shoot!" a voice urged. "For God's sake don't shoot!"

"You may be my executioners!" Brent cried to the men below him, "but you are not my judges. You may kill me, but my name belongs to the future! With my last breath I cry to my people: Go on, fight and win the Black Crusade! Go on to dominion and glory, if it must be, with bloody feet, over the prostrate bodies of those who once called you slaves!"

A sharp volley rang out. Judge Beckford's friends had avenged him.

Brent tottered, and a froth of blood sprang to his lips. With his free hand he supported himself by clinging to the window casing, while with his left hand, by a supreme effort, he drew his daughter high up against his breast where all could see her.

"My son," he gasped. "My daughter—I have given all."

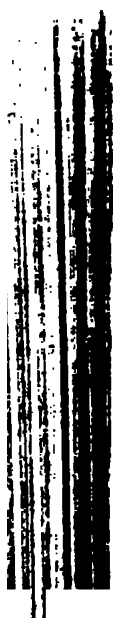
Then, as an exclamation of horror rose from the men beneath, he fell backward into the room.

In another moment the thick smoke poured its heavy volume from the window where he had stood. But Brent and Hortense were gone forever.

Slowly the great sun rose and the fair morning brightened, but above Comorn rolled and leaped the somber smoke and crimson flame. Against even the brightening glory of the morning sky the Black Crusader had unfurled and flung the awful challenge of his sable flag.

THE END







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